

## **THE INCARNATIONAL CHRISTOLOGY OF JOHN**

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John leaves no doubt as to the purpose of writing his Gospel. He states it explicitly in John 20:31: ". . . these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (NASB). John seeks to support and defend this purpose by the selections, (more material was available than John utilized, according to 20:30) arrangement, and exposition of the material in his Gospel, From the beginning of the Prologue where the Word is said to have become flesh in Jesus to Thomas' majestic conclusion "My Lord and my God" (20:28) , the reader is constantly reminded that Jesus is much more than a mere man representing a deity, He is very God of very God come in the flesh. Jesus' work of salvation ("believing you may have life in His name") is dependent upon the nature of His person ("the Christ, the Son of God").

### *I. The Prologue (John 1:1-18)*

The clearest and most explicit statement in the NT concerning the Incarnation is in the Prologue of John. The Prologue applies the term Logos or Word to Christ in describing the person of Christ and particularly His relationship with God.<sup>1</sup> In using the term Logos, the author is using a word which had currency and a range of meanings in both the Hellenistic and Hebrew world.

<sup>1</sup> Scholars have debated whether the Prologue was "elevated prose" (L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971],72) or poetry (C. F. Burney, *Aramaic Origin*, 40-41; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary,'3). Beasley-Murray observes (John, 4): "If indeed 14-18 are to be viewed as elements of the Church's confession of faith, like 3:16, this would underscore what in

*Logos in the Hellenistic World*

In ca. 500 B.C. Heraclitus first made use of the Logos concept. In a world of constant flux Heraclitus sought to find some abiding principle. He called this Logos. J. Adams writes, "He seems to conceive it as the rational principle, power, or being which speaks to men both from without and from within--the universal word which for those who have ears to hear is audible both in nature and in their own hearts, the voice, in short, of the divine."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, "In Heraclitus the three conceptions, Logis, Fire and God, are fundamentally the same. Regarded as the Logos, God is the omnipresent Wisdom by which all things are steered."<sup>3</sup> Since this Logos permeated everything, there was no transcendence.

Heraclitus' successors--to the extent they understood fire as the primordial source of all things--were the Stoics. This creative fire was called the logos spermatikos (i.e., Seminal Reason). E. Bevan asserted that "the orderly working of nature was its operation: organic beings grew according to regular types, because the Divine Reason was in them as a λόγος σπερματικός, a formula of life developing from a germ."<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, led the Stoics into a warm "theoretical pantheism," as seen in the Hymn to Zeus of Cleanthes of Epictetus' Discourses.<sup>5</sup> The Stoic logos is not parallel to the Logos of John, as Bevan observes: "It is sometimes said that the Stoic σπερματικός λόγος; was parallel to the cosmic Logos of Philo or the Fourth Gospel, but in the fragments of the old Stoic books the word is habitually used in the plural, σπερματικοὶ λόγοι, for the multitude of specific types reproduced by propagation. Stoicism knew of no cosmic Logos distinct from God or the Divine fire: where they speak of the λόγος of the world in the singular they generally mean the 'scheme' of the world."<sup>6</sup>

any case is implied in the postulate of a hymn at the base of the prologue, that the theology of the Logos incarnate was not the product of a single theological genius, as the Church has generally viewed the Evangelist, but a fundamental tenet of a church (or group of churches) of which the Evangelist was a prominent leader, whose gospel is its definitive exposition." Furthermore, the commonly regarded Christological hymns Phil 2:6-11 and Col. 1:15-20 are theologically very closely related to the Prologue. The literature on John is massive. The student is referred to the extensive bibliographical information in Beasley-Murray for further study; for bibliography on the Prologue, see Beasley-Murray, *John*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *The Religious Teachers of Greece*, 222, quoted in W. F. Howard, *Christianity. According to St. John* (London: Duckworth) 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Stoics and Sceptics*, 43, quoted in W. F. Howard, *Christianity*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> W. F. Howard, *Christianity*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> *Late Greek Religion*, XV, quoted in W. F. Howard, *Christianity*, 36.

The Hellenistic Jew Philo of Alexandria also developed a logos doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Through the hermeneutical method of allegory, Philo attempted to trace Greek ideas to a Hebrew origin. With Plato he believed the logos to belong to the world of ideas; however, he went further than Plato and linked logos with the expression of the idea as well. D. Guthrie<sup>8</sup> summarizes five points distinctive of Philo's logos doctrine:

- (i) The logos has no distinct personality. It is described as 'the image of God. . . through whom the whole universe was framed.'<sup>9</sup> But since it is also described in terms of a rudder to guide all things in their course, or as God's instrument (*organon*) for fashioning the world,<sup>10</sup> it seems clear that Philo did not think of logos in personal terms.
- (ii) Philo speaks of the logos as God's first-born son (*protogonos huios*),<sup>11</sup> which implies pre-existence. The logos is certainly regarded as eternal. Other descriptions of the logos as God's ambassador (*presbeutes*), as man's advocate (*parakletos*) and as high priest (*archiereus*), although offering interesting parallels with Jesus Christ, do not, however, require pre-existence.
- (iii) The logos is not linked with light and life in Philo's doctrine as it is John's, and combination cannot have been derived from him, although it would have been congenial to him.
- (iv) There is no suggestion that the logos could become incarnate. This would have been alien to Greek thought, because of the belief in the evil of matter.
- (v) The logos definitely had a mediatorial function to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and the world. It can be regarded as a personification of an effective intermediary, although it was never personalized.<sup>12</sup> Philo's logos has, therefore, both parallels and differences from John's logos. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Appeals have been made to two other sources as a background to explain John's logos doctrine: the Hermetic literature,<sup>14</sup> speculative

<sup>7</sup> For an extensive discussion of Philo's logos doctrine, see W. F. Howard, 36ff.; C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 66f.; 276ff..

<sup>8</sup> *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981) 322-23.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Philo, *De Somm.* 11.45.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Philo. *De migr.* Abr. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Philo. *De agr.* 51.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Howard, *Christianity*, 38, who sums up Philo's logos in the following way. "Philo uses the form Logos to express the conception of a mediator between the transcendent God and the universe, an immanent power active in creation and revelation, but though the Logos is often personified, it is never truly personalized."

<sup>13</sup> For a useful survey of views, Guthrie (*New Testament Theology*, 323) directs the reader to E. M. Sidebottom's *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel* (1961) 26ff.

<sup>14</sup> On the Hermetic literature, cf. C. H. Dodd *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press) 10-53.

philosophical writings of the second and third centuries A.D. and the Mandaean liturgies, dated even later,<sup>15</sup> and for that reason held to be insignificant as related to John.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the *logos* idea is used, frequently in the tractate *Poimandres* (a tract that speculates on Genesis' cosmogony), there is no evidence of literary dependency. C. H. Dodd says that the parallels seen can be attributed to "the result of minds working under the same general influences."<sup>17</sup>

### *Logos in the Hebraic World*

In recent years the attention of scholars has turned from Greek to Jewish sources as a background for John in general and the *logos* concept in particular. Several major Jewish sources have been suggested:<sup>18</sup> the OT, non-cannical wisdom literature, rabbinic idea of Torah, and Qumran literature.

First, the divinely spoken "word" (*dabar*) of God in the OT communicates the creative power of God (cf. Gen 1:3ff.; Ps 33:6; 107:20). Sometimes *dabar* is translated as "deed,"<sup>19</sup> thus indicating the

<sup>15</sup> R. Bultmann (*The Gospel of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971] 8) claims that John is dependent on the gnostic Odes of Solomon. This thesis has been undermined by recent research on gnosticism. It appears there is no evidence (or full-blown pre-Christian gnosticism. Cf. E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Dodd thinks that, "The Compilation of the Mandaean Canon. . . cannot be dated much, if at all, before A.D. 700" (*Interpretation*, 115). Therefore if there is any literary conceptual dependence it is in the direction from John to the Mandaeans. As R. M. Grant tersely observes: "The most obvious explanation of the origin of the Gnostic redeemer is that he was modeled after the Christian conception of Jesus. It seems significant that we know of no redeemer before Jesus, while we encounter other redeemers (Simon Magus, Menander) immediately after his time" (*Gnosticism*, London 1961, 18).

<sup>17</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 247.

<sup>18</sup> Another source suggested, *memra* (the Aramaic term for "word") in the Targums has been called "a blind alley in the study of biblical background of John's Logos doctrine." Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, (SPCK, 1962) 128. The Memra Yahweh, according to the results of the exhaustive studies of Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II (C. H. Beck, 1961), 302-33 and Vinzenz Hamp, *Der Begriff 'Wort' in den aramaeischen Bibeluebersetzungen* (Neuer Fiber-Verlag, 1938), 193, fails to account for the Johannine personalization. The targums never translate such phrases as "the word of God" or "the word (*dabar*) of the Lord." Cf. G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, I (Harvard, 1962) 417. The Memra Yahweh and Logos of John have no relationship and no bearing upon one another. *Memra* refers neither to divine revelation nor to a divine mediator of God.

<sup>19</sup> Eero Repo, *Der Begriff 'Rhema' im Biblisch-Griechischen: I, 'Rhema' in der Septuaginta* (1951), 59-62.

"dynamic" coloring of the word. God's word is His creative act, His powerful agent. God's *dabar*, in its creative faculty, possesses the power of self-realization (Isa 55:10, 11): it will accomplish what it purposes.

Another group of *dabar* passages is used to indicate divine revelation through the prophets to the people Israel (Amos 3:1, 8; Isa 9:8; Jer 1:4, 20:8; Ezek 33:7). To some degree the term is identified with the Torah, and in Ps 119:9, 105, the whole message of God to humanity. Not found in the OT is the idea of God's word as a distinctive "entity" existing alongside God. While Ps 33:6; 107:20; 147:15 and Isa 55:10f. may approach a personification of the word, one does not find a hypostasis.

Wisdom is another OT concept that has significance for the logos idea.<sup>20</sup> Wisdom is not the product of creation<sup>21</sup> but is initiated from God; it is a gift of God. In Proverbs 8, a personified wisdom is spoken of as having been present at the world's creation (8:27ff.). However, the fact of it also speaking of its own creation in 8:22 must qualify the understanding given to its pre-existence.<sup>22</sup>

In other Judaistic thought and the intertestamental literature which preceded it one finds the concept of a mediating divine hypostasis more closely aligned to John, but even here it does not parallel it in equal force, originality or content. In the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon the Logos ("thine all powerful word") "leaped from heaven down from the royal throne, a stern warrior, into the midst of the doomed land" (Wis 18:15). Wisdom is furthermore spoken of as a "semi-divine" figure whose source is the Deity and whose works include the following: the creation and preservation of the world and the purification and inspiration of men (7:22-8:3; 9:4, 9-11).<sup>23</sup> In this literature one finds that while wisdom is personified it is not personalized (i.e., it is spoken of in personal terms without being regarded as a person).

A third Jewish source is the rabbinic idea of Torah. The parallels between this and John's Logos are as follows:<sup>24</sup> "First, the Torah was

<sup>20</sup> See. A van Roon, "The Relation between Christ and the Wisdom of God according to Paul," *NovT* 16 (1974) 207-19 for the OT and intertestamental evidence of the wisdom concept.

<sup>21</sup> Job 28:12-19.

<sup>22</sup> F. M. Braun, "Jean le Theologien: 2. Les grandes traditions d'Israel," *Etudes bibliques* (1964) 137-150 and R. E. Brown *John* (Garden City: Doubleday 1966) 520ff.

<sup>23</sup> By the time of the Gospels, this later concept was widespread both in the OT and apocryphal literature: Provs 8:1-9:18; Job 28:12-28; 4 Ezra 5:10; 1 Bar 3:9-4:4; Sir 1:1-10, 14-20; 24:1-22; 51:13-30; 1 Enoch 42; 2 Enoch 30:8.

<sup>24</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 325.

believed to have been created before the foundation of the world; in other words, its pre-existence is asserted. Secondly, the Torah lay on God's bosom. Thirdly, 'my daughter, she is the Torah.' Fourthly, through the first born, God created the heaven and the earth, and the first-born is no other than the Torah. Fifthly, the words of the Torah are life for the world." John, however, asserts the superiority of Jesus Christ to Moses the Torah-giver (John 1:17). Moses gave the Law, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John far surpasses the affirmation of the rabbis by offering and producing much more than the pre-existent Torah could.

The Qumran literature, while not contributing directly to the issue at hand does lessen the significance of Hellenistic claims by providing a contemporary Jewish dualistic background that "approximates more closely. . . John's background in his Logos doctrine than does the gnostic dualism which Bultmann stresses so strongly. Indeed, the Qumran dualism, like John's, is monotheistic, ethical and eschatological."<sup>25</sup>

The question still remains, in view of the Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds, why John preferred to call Jesus the Logos--and what he meant by it. The answer lies close at hand. Christ Himself is the source for the content of the idea. The meaning of the Logos comes out clearly in an exegesis of the Prologue passage itself. It will be seen to include His pre-existence, His Deity, His creative agency, His incarnation, His person as the source of light and life, and the revelational and soteriological aspects of His earthly ministry. To what purpose and for what profit are we invited to investigate Hellenistic and Hebraic understandings of logos, if not as sources of John's concept? We investigate these systems for the overtones and implications they provide to the Prologue and which John nuanced in employing this unique expression of Jesus' person. V. Hamp says that "the Johannine prologue with its Logos reveals something new in terms of content; by it a hellenistic term is Christianized, and the Word of creation is clearly made known. The doctrine of truth of the OT is worked into the speculation."<sup>26</sup>

Taken from this perspective, according to J. Boice, the parallels are striking.

To the Greeks especially, but also to the Jews, the description of Christ as Logos points emphatically to His pre-existent state as Son of God and mediator of the creation. In John's thought, however, the conception rises far above that of a mere Son of God, a figure who partakes in some

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>26</sup> V. Hamp, *Der Begriff*, 193, quoted in James M. Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 163.

measure of God's nature, to describe the Son *par excellence*--eternally existing with God, partaking in its fullness of the divine nature, and acting with God in the creation (v. 3) and the preservation of the world (v. 4). To the Jew the 'word' recalls creative action, action which is at once a revelation of God's person and of His inscrutable will. John adds, however, that the revelation in Christ, God's perfect Word, reveals as no other the fullness of God's glory in its aspects of grace and truth (v. 14) and is that which above all else summons men to repentance and to the acceptance of light and life through Him.

The Logos terminology rises to new heights in John in expressing a two-fold significance of Jesus Christ--the significance of His person in its pre-existent and incarnate states and the significance of His ministry as an act of revelation and reconciliation. All this John does without in the least distracting from the importance of the historical Jesus as the focal point of the divine disclosure. For whatever may have been the teachings about the Logos in the first Christian century, it is John's first and distinctive teaching that *Jesus*, not another, is the divine hypostasis who had been with God from all eternity, who was God, and who took on human form by incarnation, appearing on earth for the saving revelation of the Father, and that the Logos, in spite of contemporary teaching and the philosophical speculations attaching to it, is only to be found in this historical personage and at this moment in history in which He made His person known.<sup>27</sup>

We now turn to defend and substantiate the conclusion just described by a careful examination of the usage of Logos in John.

### *Logos in John*

The Logos idea in John's Prologue makes certain affirmations which simultaneously eliminate certain alternative ways of interpreting Jesus of Nazareth. The belief of Christ as God incarnate is presupposed by the idea of creation. Vv 1-3 of John read thusly: (NASB) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; He was in the beginning with God. All things come into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." The Word was with God (*pros ton theon*) describes the pre-creation state, a formula similar to Gen 1:1. The deity of the Word is explicitly affirmed, without obscuring distinction between the Word and God. Some have erroneously concluded that the absence of an article before *theos* meant that "the Word was a God" (or divine). *Theos* is a predicate, so that interpretation is without defense.<sup>28</sup> It is absolutely clear to the reader of John that the

<sup>27</sup> Boice, *John*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> E. C. Colwell, *JBL* 52 (1933) 20.

Word shared in the nature of Deity. He did not mean, however, that the Word and God were simply interchangeable words. While the Word is fully Deity, the concept of God embraces more than the Word. John does not explain it further.

The relationship between the Word and the world is clearly articulated: "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." The Word is God's agent in the creation of the universe, a thought not dissimilar from that of Paul in Col 1:15. The Word is clearly distinct from the creation in kind, not merely in degree. Creation *ex nihilo* is both presupposed by and demanded for the Incarnation. H. P. Owen correctly observes: "Those who do not base their Christology on the concept of creation *ex nihilo* inevitably exhibit Christ as one who differs in degree, but not in kind, from other men. Thus according to Hegelianism Christ can be no more than the supreme expression of God's universal presence in humanity. Again, for Whitehead Christ can be no more than the moment of greatest significance in the cosmic process whereby God and the world create each other. By contrast those who follow the teaching of the councils are obligated to hold that although no man is divine God in Christ totally transcended his normal relation to creatures by hypostatically uniting a human nature to his own. It is only if we place Christ in the context of the creator-creature relationship that we can regard him as being absolutely unique and intrinsically unsurpassable."<sup>29</sup> The Logos is distinct from creation. A different verb is used for the creation ("to become") and the Logos ("to be").

V 14 asserts that this eternally pre-existent Word became flesh in Christ. Flesh signifies in this context human nature, the full and real manhood of the incarnate Logos. Thus certain conclusions follow. First, adoptionism is ruled out. From the beginning of his life Jesus was God Incarnate. Second, Jesus was the Incarnation of the eternal pre-existent Word. His place is firmly fixed in the divine Trinity. It was the Son, not the Spirit or Father, that became a man in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the idea that Jesus as the Son is inferior to God the Father in His being and status (subordinationism) is ruled out. John did not say the Word was *theios* (divine) but rather *theos* (God). Owen explains the implications of this distinction. "To say that the Word was divine could leave room for subordinationism which can be excluded only by affirming an identity of being between him and God. Of course the Son is subordinate to the Father in the sense that he is derived from the Father, but if. . . he receives the Father's

<sup>29</sup> H. P. Owen, *Christian Theism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984) 24.

whole nature, he and the Father are co-equal."<sup>30</sup> This emphasis of the full Deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ simultaneously disavows both docetism and (later) Arianism.

## II. *Son of God*

John states that his purpose (20:31) is to convince his readers that Jesus is the Son of God. He accomplishes this purpose by the selection and arrangement of his material. While the title itself occurs several times, the description of the unique absolute qualitative Father-Son relationship throughout the gospel establishes the concept even more firmly than the mere usage of the title. Jesus was conscious of being the unique Son of the Father and we find Jesus referring to God as his Father more than a hundred times. On four occasions John describes Jesus as the "only (*monogenes*) son" (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18). While exegetes differ as to its meaning, it appears most likely that *monogenes* means something like "alone of its kind"--the only one of that genus. It would therefore be used to heighten Jesus' Unique "one of a kind" qualitatively different sonship. Jesus' sonship differs from ours in kind, not in degree. Jesus makes this distinction in John 20:17 where he refers to "my Father and your father" and "my God and your God."

On several occasions in John, Jesus was recognized as Son of God: John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), and Martha (11:27). In John 10:36 Jesus' critics charged Him with blasphemy. In this discussion Jesus particularly claimed to be the Son of God--thus emptying charge of substance. His works were evidence that He did the works of His Father. The incident of the raising of Lazarus was "so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." The charge was made before Pilate that Jesus called himself the Son of God (19:7).

Guthrie delineates eight special characteristics of Jesus as the Son of God in John.<sup>31</sup> (1) "The Son is sent by the Father" (3:34; 5:36, 38; 7:29; 11:42). The pre-existence of Jesus is implied in these passages. The incarnation is a continuation of the relationship the Father and Son had in eternity, even as is demonstrated by the Logos doctrine. (2) "The love of the Father for the Son" (3:35, "all things given into the Son's hand"; 5:20, the Father "shows the Son all that he is doing"; 10:17, "the Father's love is intensified by the Son's voluntary laying

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 28. G. W. H. Lampe (*Christ, Faith and History* [ed. S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton: Cambridge, 1972] 124) says that the ancient church adopted a Logos-Son Christology rather than a Spirit-possession Christology in order to establish belief in Jesus' absolute uniqueness as God incarnate.

<sup>31</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 313-16.

down of His life"; 17:24, the Father's love for the Son "existed before the foundation of the world.") (3) "the dependence of the Son on the Father." John 5:19 says: "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." The Son is perfectly obedient to the will of the Father. "The dependence of the Son on the will and power of the Father demonstrates, not the inferiority of the Son, but the identify of purpose between the Father and the Son (cf. 14:20). The absolute unity of Father and Son (10:30, 17:11; cf. 14:11, 20) is as important as the dependence of the Son on the Father. Those two concepts are different facets of one truth and neither can be separated from the other. John, in recording them, evidently saw no contradiction between them."<sup>32</sup> (4) "Son prays to the Father." Jesus prays at Lazarus' tomb (11:41): "Father, I thank thee that thou has heard me." Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 11 represents the height of intimacy between Jesus and His Father (He refers to God as His Father six times: 11:1, 15, 11, 21, 24, 25). (5) "Jesus as Son makes claim to be the exclusive revelation of the Father." Jesus alone has been in the presence of God the Father (6:46). "As the Father knows me and I know the Father" (10:15) shows the transparency between Father and Son. Jesus reveals the nature of God (8:19; 14:8-9). (6) "The Son speaks the words of the Father." Jesus said, ". . . for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (15:15). Jesus speaks on the authority of God His Father who has "given me commandment what to say and what to speak" (12:49f). "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (14:24). (7) "The Father has given all things into the Son's hand." (13:3ff). Jesus said, "All that the Father has is mine" (16:15). The Son also shares with God the Father in judgment (8:16). (8) "Jesus speaks of returning to the Father, especially in the farewell discourses. ." (14:12, 14:28; 16:10, 16:16ff.; 16:28; 20:11). The triumphant ascension of Jesus demonstrates the consummation of the work of the exalted Son.

### III. *Son of Man*

The expression "Son of Man" is used 13 times in John's Gospel.<sup>33</sup> In the usage of this expression one finds first of all fundamental agreement with the understanding of "Son of Man" as found in the synoptics, and secondly further explicit development of meaning.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>33</sup> John 1:51, 3:13; 3:14; 5:27; 6:27; 6:53; 6:62; 8:28; 9:35; 12:23; 12:34; 13:31.

<sup>34</sup> While the point of this article is not to review or establish the source(s) of the Son of Man sayings, this author concurs with the conclusion of scholars that hold that

The Son of man in John is similar to the Synoptics in that this figure is associated with the theme of vindication after suffering.<sup>35</sup> Most of the Johannine Son of Man sayings combine the two ideas of humiliation and honor into one expression. An example of this would be when Jesus speaks of being "glorified" (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:34; 12:23; 13:31). A difference in John is the lack of the Synoptic emphasis on the vindication of the Son of Man in the eschaton.

From an examination of the Son of Man passages certain characteristics emerge of the meaning and usage of Son of Man in John. First, several statements assert the authority of the Son of Man. For example, in John 6:27 the activities of the Son of Man are parallel to those activities of God. The implication is clear: There is no difference between God's and the Son of Man's authority. The Son of Man can give eternal life (3:14, 15; 6:27) and has the authority to execute judgment (5:26f.). Not only does the Son of Man's mission involve salvation, but ultimately judgment and condemnation in the future as well. Second, the pre-existence and destiny of the Son of Man is identified. John 1:51 and 3:13 emphasize the "descent and ascent" of the Son of Man. "Descent" primarily reveals Jesus' awareness of being sent from God, while "ascent" indicates the truth that the real home of the Son of Man is heaven in the presence of the Father, and thence He shall return to God. The idea of pre-existence (John 6:62: "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?") dove-tails with the Logos doctrine of the Prologue. The historical Jesus of Nazareth is to be seen from the perspective of his eternal pre-existence. The Son of Man is glorified in 12:23 and 13:31.<sup>36</sup> Thirdly, some Son of Man sayings are in the context of being crucified-"lifted up."<sup>37</sup> Two implications are derived from this usage: 1) the heavenly Son of Man, as in the Synoptics, is related to the death, humiliation and passion but nevertheless 2) continue to embrace the idea of the future exaltation after the death (which ties in with the previous discussion of the glorification concept). In summation, the Son of Man in John's Gospel is the pre-existent Logos who enters into the world incarnate in Jesus, suffers, dies, is exalted and glorified

the Son of Man logia stems from authentic primitive tradition about and from Jesus and consequently belongs to the earliest theological stratum of John's Gospel. See I. H. Marshall, "The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 12 (1965-66) 327-51 and also S. S. Smalley, "The Johannine Son of Man Sayings," *NTS* 15 (1968-69) 278-301.

<sup>35</sup> This theme appears in Daniel, 1 Enoch and 2 Esdras.

<sup>36</sup> See also 2:11; 5:41ff.; 7:18; 8:50f.; 11:4; 12:41; 17:1f.; 17:22,24.

<sup>37</sup> The three passages are 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34.

and is given God's authority to execute judgment on the earth and in eternity.

#### IV. *Signs*

John speaks of Christ's miracles as signs (*semeia*). However, *semeia* does not always refer to a miracle; it can refer to Christ's non-miraculous "works." A sign is a "token" or "distinguishing mark" (like circumcision is a token or sign of the covenant in Gen 17:11). A sign is a symbol which points to something beyond itself. A miracle may be a sign by pointing to the presence of a divine person or authenticating a prophet who has been authorized by God. John makes clear the role of signs in his volume: "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:30, 31). The point of the signs is to draw attention to Jesus and exemplify some aspect of his Person. Selected examples would be as follows: (1) the miraculous transformation of water into wine at Cana (2:1-11) had a two-fold result: it manifested Jesus Christ's glory immediately which awakened faith in His disciples, and it showed the unity between Jesus the Son and God the Father in creative power, (2) the second sign, healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54), demonstrated Jesus' power over sickness, (3) the healing of the impotent man (5:1-18) demonstrates Jesus' power over sickness again and shows the life-saving power of the Incarnate Word, (4) the multiplication of the loaves and fish (6:1-14) shows both Christ's creative power over nature as well as demonstrates the point that Christ Himself is the Bread of life, (5) Christ's walking on the water (6:16-21) demonstrates His power over nature, (6) the healing of the man blind from birth (9:1-41) shows Christ's power to heal both physically and spiritually, (7) apart from His own resurrection, the resuscitation of Lazarus from the grave (11:1-46) is the greatest demonstration of Christ's triumph over nature, sin, sickness and death itself. In the discourse material connected with this story Jesus makes the claim to be "the resurrection and the life." The meaning of this miracle is summarized succinctly by Dodd: "first, that eternal life may be enjoyed here and now by those who respond to the word of Christ, and secondly, that the same power which assures eternal life to believers during their earthly existence will, after the death of the body, raise the dead to renewed existence in a world beyond."<sup>38</sup> The signs have as their overriding motivation and object

<sup>38</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation*, 364.

the revelation of Jesus' glory. Jesus demonstrates signs to demonstrate His divine nature and miraculous power, with the consequence of arousing faith in those who witness His "signs and wonders." The signs, particularly the latter ones, are often accompanied by a propositional and authoritative discourse, which itself becomes a part of the divine revelation.

### V. *The Discourses*

The discourse of Jesus in John 3:1-21 with Nicodemus explains in detail the nature of spiritual regeneration. The idea of Jesus' inaugurating a new era had been intimated in the two earlier signs: Jesus turning the water into wine and the cleansing of the temple (2:13-22). In John 4 Jesus is recorded as healing an official's son. A discourse of Jesus on the water of life (4:7-26) introduces the pericope; in the context it looks backward to new birth (3:5) and forward to the healing of the official's son.

Jesus heals the man at the Bethesda pool (John 5) which issues in Jesus' defense of His nature as Son of God and giver of life (5:26-29, 40). The feeding of the five thousand in John 6 is explicated by a discussion on Jesus' being the bread of life (6:25-65). The man's sight restored in John 9 is preceded by a conflict between the Jews and Jesus (8:12-59) which begins with Jesus' assertion "I am the light of the world" and concludes with the absolute use of *ego eimi* ("before Abraham was I am"). The raising of Lazarus introduces the sixth discourse (John 10:1-18) where Jesus identifies Himself as Israel's true shepherd who gives His life for others (vv 11, 15, 17, f.). The last discourse (chaps 14-16) is introduced by the catch of fish (John 21). Jesus declares Himself to be "the way, the truth and the life" (14:6).

### VI. *The "I Am" Sayings*

The "I Am" statements of Jesus are significant in establishing the Christology of John. One of the reasons for this is that the sentence "I Am" is used in the OT as a self-designated name of God. God says "I am that I am" in Exod 3:14. Upon examination one finds seven "I Am" sayings of Jesus, each one demonstrating some work of Jesus: bread--sustenance (6:35); light--illumination (8:12); door--admission (10:7); shepherd--nurturing and protection (10:11); resurrection and life--quickenings (11:25); way, truth, life--leading (14:6); vine--making fruitful (15:1). The unparalleled audacity of such a statement as "I am the light of the world" becomes credible, rather than demonstrating insanity, only from the mouth of one who was indeed and in fact

God's sole agent in the universe's creation. In the Prologue the work of the Logos is in the abstract; in the "I Am" sayings it takes on flesh and becomes personal.

While some may argue that the "I Am" sayings really mean no more than an emphatic first person self-identification, the usage of "I Am" in John 8:58 demands more. Jesus answered in reply to a question from the Jews about whether he had seen Abraham, "Before Abraham was (*en*), I am (*ego eimi*)."<sup>39</sup> This writer concurs with Guthrie's analysis of this staggering passage:

The force of the absolute use of 'I am' here must be gauged against the absolute use of the phrase in John 8:24 and 13:19. This usage cannot be explained by parallels in the synoptic gospels (e.g., Mk. 6:50; Mt. 14:26) where the phrase represents a simple affirmative. John 6:20 seems to be a parallel Johannine example of this. Another occurrence which is probably of the same type is John 18:5, although some have seen it as evidence of a divine claim because of the dramatic action of those who had come to arrest Jesus. Yet the contrast between the *en* (was) applied to Abraham and the *ego eimi* here must be seen as linked with the name for Yahweh revealed in Exodus 3 and with the absolute use of 'I am' ('*ani hu*') in Isaiah 46:4. It must be noted that when the form of words used in this latter passage occurs elsewhere in the OT (Dt. 32:39; Is. 43:10), it is attributed to God as speaker, followed by words which express his uniqueness. There seems little doubt, therefore, that the statement of 8:58 is intended to convey in an extraordinary way such exclusively divine qualities as changelessness and pre-existence. The divine implication of the words would alone account for the extraordinary anger and opposition which the claim immediately arouse.

The implications of such a statement were not lost on G. K. Chesterton:<sup>40</sup>

Right in the middle of all these things stands up an enormous exception . . . It is nothing less than the loud assertion that this mysterious maker of the world has visited his world in person. It declares that really and even recently, or right in the middle of historic times, there did walk into the world this original invisible being; about whom the thinkers make theories and the mythologists hand down myths; the Man Who Made the World. That such a higher personality exists behind all things had indeed always been implied by the best thinkers, as well as by all the most beautiful legends. But nothing of this sort had ever been implied in any of them. It is simply false to say that the other sagas and heroes had claimed to be the mysterious master and maker, of whom the world had dreamed and disputed. Not one of them had ever claimed to be anything of the sort.

<sup>39</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 332.

<sup>40</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1908) 93.

The most that any religious prophet had said was that he was the true servant of such a being. The most that any primitive myth had ever suggested was that the Creator was present at the Creation. But that the Creator was present. . . in the daily life of the Roman Empire--that is something utterly unlike anything else in nature. It is the one great startling statement that man has made since he spoke his first articulate word, instead of barking like a dog. . .it make nothing but dust and nonsense of comparative religion.

## VII. *Miscellaneous*

### *Humanity--Sinlessness*

John makes it clear that the Logos took on real flesh--true humanity. He wearied physically on trips (4:6), thirsted (4:7; 19:28), wept (11:33-35), prepared fish (21:9) and died on the cross. There is no docetism in John's gospel. He affirms that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. While He was fully man He was nevertheless sinless. "Which of you convicts me of sin?" Jesus remonstrated (8:44). If Jesus were not sinless, claims such as "I am the light of the world" would not only provide evidence for His emotional imbalance but would betray a megalomaniac arrogance indescribable. Jesus said he reflected the will of God in His person and work (10:37f; 14:10-11; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4). If He was a sinner, how could He have truthfully claimed to be one with the Father (10:30, 17:22)?

### *God*

The title God is used of Jesus Christ in two places: The Prologue (John 1:1 and 1:18 which have already been discussed) and John 20:28 where Thomas exclaims: "My Lord and my God!" The Gospel that begins with the affirmation Jesus is God ends with the same ringing declaration.

### *Lord*

An examination of the sparse usage of Lord (*Kyrios*) in John reveals a non-theological usage before the resurrection (4:1; 6:23; 11:2) and a theological usage afterwards (chaps 20 and 21). In the latter case, Thomas' confession, it is significantly linked with God.

### *Messiah*

The background for John's use of Messiah is intensely Hebraic. In John 1:41 and 4:25 both the original Aramaic form and the Greek translation are given. Another occasion for its use is Andrew's declaration to Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). Then Philip declares to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law

and also the prophets wrote." Here again Messiahship was understood against an OT background. In the confession of Martha in 11:27, Messiah is coupled with the formula "Son of God" (one finds it again in 20:31). The Messiahship John presents is qualified in such a way that would exclude a political understanding. On another occasion Jesus explicitly rejected such an understanding (6:15 when the people wanted to make Jesus an earthly king). John corrected some popular views of Messiahship (7:27 that he had a secret origin and 7:34, that he would continue forever without death at all), but squarely asserted that He was a kingly (but not political) Messiah.<sup>41</sup> The basic teaching of John's gospel is that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. He corrected current false understandings and interpretations of messianic expectations and replaced them with a new higher spiritual sense which is understandable only in the context of Incarnate Logos and Father/Son filial relationship.

### *Conclusion*

From the time of John to this present hour the high doctrine of the Incarnation has been under attack. The Ebionites and docetists attempted to supplant it in the 2nd century. In the 4th century Arius argued that there was a time when the Logos was not, that the Second Person of the Godhead was a created being. In the decision of the Council of Nicea, the church universal affirmed the Incarnation. In A.D. 318 in his brilliant, historic and still relevant treatise, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei (On the Incarnation of the Word of God)*, the nineteen year old Egyptian deacon Athanasius emphasized that the love of God was manifested in the Incarnate Logos' supreme sacrifice. He argued correctly that if the Son is a creature, he would need redemption Himself. Only God could bring salvation. At one time it looked as if the doctrine of the Incarnation would be jettisoned in the interest of maintaining peace within Christendom. "The world is against you," they shouted at Athanasius. He retorted flashing his black eyes, "If the world is against Athanasius, then Athanasius is against the world." Five times he was banished from the empire for holding firm to this doctrine of the Incarnation. His heritage to the

<sup>41</sup> See Nathanael's confession of Jesus being "King of the Jews" in 1:49; the triumphal entry in 12:13 more than anything emphasizes the kingly nature of Jesus' messiahship. The onlookers hailed Him as "king of Israel." Standing before Pilate at His trial provides another clear opportunity to assert the kingship theme in connection with the concept of Messiah. For a good discussion on why there appears to be no "Messianic secret" in John, see S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist & Interpreter* (Greenwood, S.C.: Attic, 1978) 217f.; and Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 243f.

church universal was to pass on to subsequent generations the doctrine of the Incarnation intact. Chesterton captures the high drama and theological implications of this issue.<sup>42</sup>

There had arisen in that hour of history, defiant above the democratic tumult of the Councils of the Church, Athanasius against the world. We may pause upon the point at issue; because it is relevant to the whole of this religious history, and the modern world seems to miss the whole point of it. We might put it this way. If there is one question which the enlightened and liberal have the habit of deriding and holding up as a dreadful example of barren dogma and senseless sectarian strife, it is this Athanasian question of the Co-Eternity of the Divine Son. On the other hand, if there is one thing that the same liberals always offer us as a piece of pure and simple Christianity, untroubled by doctrinal disputes, it is the single sentence, "God is love."

Yet the two statements are almost identical; at least one is very nearly nonsense without the other. The barren dogma is the only logical way of stating the beautiful sentiment. For if there be a being without beginning, existing before all things, was He loving when there was nothing to be loved? H through the unthinkable eternity He is lonely, what is the meaning of saying He is love? The only justification of such a mystery is the mystical conception that in His own nature there was something analogous to self-expression; something of what begets and beholds what it has begotten. Without some such idea, it is really illogical to complicate the ultimate essence of deity with an idea like love. If the moderns really want a simple religion of love, they must look for it in the Athanasian Creed. The truth is that the trumpet of true Christianity, the challenge of the charities and simplicities of Bethlehem or Christmas day, never rang out more arrestingly and unmistakably than in the defiance of Athanasius to the cold compromise of the Arians. It was emphatically he who really was fighting for a God of love against a God of colourless and remote cosmic control; the God of the stoics and the agnostics. It was emphatically he who was fighting for the Holy Child against the grey deity of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He was fighting for that very balance of beautiful interdependence and intimacy, in the very Trinity of the Divine Nature, that draws out hearts to the Trinity of the Holy Family, His dogma, if the phrase be not misunderstood, turns even God into a Holy Family.

During the Reformation, Socinianism attempted to repeat the old christological heresies. In the present day there are clear indications that the christological battle of the ancient church needs to be fought all over again. Major theologians and ecclesiastical leaders have made a concerted drive to route the doctrine of the Incarnation from Christendom. Klaas Runia in his book *The Present-Day Christological*

<sup>42</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 232-33.

*Debate* chronicles this attack on the Incarnation.<sup>43</sup> A removal of the doctrine of the Incarnation destroys the doctrine of the Trinity and ultimately affects all other major doctrines. J. Macquarrie in his review of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, the volume that began the most recent vigorous attack on the Incarnation, said: "Christian doctrines are so closely interrelated that if you take away one, several others tend to collapse. After incarnation is thrown out, is the doctrine of the Trinity bound to go? What kind of doctrine of atonement remains possible?"<sup>44</sup>

The absolute uniqueness of Jesus is dependent upon His Incarnation. H. P. Owen observes that "if he (Jesus) was God incarnate and if the Incarnation was unrepeatable he must have been absolutely unique. Similarly the only absolutely unique element in Christianity--the only thing that distinguishes it wholly from all other religion--is the belief that the Creator became man in one figure of history. This point has been well made thus by J. A. Baker:<sup>45</sup>

The one totally new thing which Christianity brought into the world was the belief, hammered out over the first four-and-a-half centuries of its existence, that in Jesus of Nazareth God had been living a genuine human life. Other religions had gods walk the earth incognito, or had proclaimed the divinization of some hero or sage. Christianity alone took a historical person and said, "Here in this human personality, with all the limitations and suffering of our human condition, was the eternal God, the Cause and Origin of all that is". As defined in all its classical rigour this is the unique feature of the Christian religion, its only valid claim to separate existence. A God of goodness, a Creator who cares, it shares with Judaism, and philosophical theism. A man who truly reflects the nature of the divine is no new thing to the Hindu or the Baha'i. A divinely inspired prophet, even one miraculously born, is acceptable to Islam. The Spirit of God indwelling man and guiding and strengthening their lives is a religious commonplace. Divine food received in a sacramental meal is Zoroastrian; ritual washings and initiation rites are found universally. Islam holds fast to judgment, heaven and hell; Judaism to repentance, amendment, and God's merciful pardon. At every point accommodation is possible save at this one: this unique claim about Jesus, with its undergirding in the doctrine of the Holy Blessed and Undivided Trinity. If this goes then the end of Christianity as an independent entity cannot be indefinitely delayed. No Incarnation, no Christianity.

<sup>43</sup> K. Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> Green, Michael, ed., *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Hodder, 1977), 144.

<sup>45</sup> The quote from Bishop John Baker is from a speech made at King's College, London, in 1974 and quoted in Owen, *Christian Theism*, 49.

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