



The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John

Pieter Verster
Research fellow
Department of Practical and Missional Theology
Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, South Africa
E-mail: versterp@ufs.ac.za

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.58>

Abstract

It is generally accepted that the Gospel of John proclaims Jesus as Lord and God, One with the Father. There are, however, those who challenge this view. Recently, Nagel (2019) pointed out that Jesus is not regarded as *Theos* in the Gospel of John. He refutes the classical understanding of the texts that Jesus is One with God. He does not regard both the *Logos* of John 1:1-2 and the confession of Thomas in John 20:28 as references to Jesus. Theological views of Jesus in John are often understood as that he is One with God. To engage the most important texts in John, this article explores the views of theologians in the commentaries, especially Brown (1971a; 1971b), Schnackenburg (1968; 1980) and Von Wahlde (2010a; 2010b) From these commentaries and from engaging the texts, it is clear that *Logos* in John 1:1-2 refers to Jesus and that Thomas' confession of Jesus as Lord and God is evidence of Jesus' Divinity. This does not mean that Jesus is not also human, but that he should be acknowledged as human, as the Son of God, but also as God One with Father. Jesus' reference to himself as "I am" has an implication for his Divinity, as it is related to *YHWH* who is called "I am" in the Old Testament. Jesus is the One who is sent from God, and those who see him also see the Father. All the evidence points to the Gospel of John as accepting Jesus as God, One with the Father and the Holy Spirit in a triune Godhead.

Keywords: Jesus, Lord, God, One with God the Father, Son of God, Triune Godhead.

Introduction

At present, as in the distant past, there are challenges to the confession that Christ is verily God and verily human. The Divinity of Christ, in particular, is rejected. It is generally accepted that the Gospel of John emphasises the Divinity of Christ. One should both exegetically and hermeneutically engage intensively with the Gospel, in order to understand how it explains the Divinity of Christ. Christ's relation to God is explained from the very beginning of the Gospel. The *Logos* Christology introduces the Divinity of Christ and the confession of Thomas concludes it. One must, however, also engage those who differ from these premises, in order to come to a sound conclusion. The methodology is to access the essential aspects of the debate by an exegetical, hermeneutical and systematic theological evaluation. It is also a literature study to engage the most prominent theologians.

Challenges to the Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John

Lampe (2017:21) explains that, from his perspective, many individuals viewed themselves as the sons of God and equated to be gods in antiquity, especially among the Romans. He opines that, based on this background, Jesus was also considered to be God. Lampe asserts that "It is therefore not surprising that the New Testament, in a seemingly incoherent way, calls Jesus both



Son of God in the same sentence or passage (Hebrews 1:8; John 20:28, 31; 10:33, 36; 19:7; 1:14, 18).”

Lampe also opines that the New Testament does not clearly explain divine essence, *ousia*, later conceptualised by Athanasius against Arius. He goes so far as to say that it did not exist in the New Testament. Lampe (2017:22) explains his view that Christology ran parallel with the deification of emperors, and only later with the challenge of monotheism which explained the Divinity of Christ as one essence, *ousia*, with God. It was thus viewed in light of the deification of the emperor. Although it is, according to him, difficult to draw conclusions from the early understanding of Christ, one must move away from the concepts of the Nicene creed. Lampe (2017:25) prefers functional and relational ontology for a new understanding of Jesus in the present world.

Nagel (2019:557-558) recently challenged the belief that Jesus Christ is *Theos*. According to him, key texts such as Philippians 2:6, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-9, and John 1:1, 2 and 20:28 do not give evidence that Jesus is *Theos*. According to Nagel, these texts either refer to God and not to Christ or must be regarded as texts not referring to God. Nagel (2019:558) writes:

The intention is to show that the NT text draws a clear distinction between Jesus and *Theos* as literary figures. On this point, there are passages in the NT that seem to suggest that Ἰησοῦς is in fact θεός. By revisiting these so-called proof texts, which people have relied on to argue this position, the present study will endeavour to disprove the notion that Ἰησοῦς (Jesus) is θεός (Theos).

Taking this into account, reference to the central challenge to Jesus' Divinity was the rivalry between Arius and Athanasius. Their different views on Christ came to a point when they clashed. For Arius, Christ was the most important creation of God. He was not One with God. He was a god. He surrendered to God. For Athanasius, Christ is of one essence with God, *homoousios*, not even *homoiousios*, of the same essence. This led to a schism. At Nicaea in 325CE, it was confessed that Christ is light from light, God from God, verily God from verily God. This confession became one of the most essential confessions of the church. The question is whether this confession is restricted to that time and not really biblical (Heick, 1973:152-166).

The Jehovah Witnesses do not accept this confession. They view Christ as a god and not of one essence with God, as Athanasius confessed (see Juanda & Chia, 2023:2-3).

The question is: What is the view in the Gospel of John? Is there a biblical foundation for the belief that God is one God in three persons and that Christ is God, One with the Father?

Confession that Jesus is divine in the Gospel of John

Theologians

In his classical commentary, Schnackenburg (1968:153ff) the renowned German Catholic priest and New Testament scholar of note, clearly states that John regards Jesus as from above. In the dualistic world view of that time, Jesus overcomes the divide between above and below. He is, however, from God and One with God. John also explains that Jesus should not be regarded in light of Gnosticism. Schnackenburg (1968:154) summarises the meaning of Christ in the Gospel of John as follows:

We must rather give full value to the second epithet, which implies the full Christian profession of faith, proclaiming the Messiahship of Jesus in a sense which surpasses all Jewish expectations, the unique dignity of the incarnate *Logos* as the 'only-begotten of the Father' (1:14), the mystery of



Jesus as 'the Son' absolutely, a mystery grasped by faith (see also 1 John 1:3; 3:8, 23; 4:9, 15; 5:5, 13, 20).

Brown (1971a:cxv) clearly states that the Gospel of John betrays a vertical approach to salvation. A horizontal approach is not totally absent, but Jesus is clearly regarded as from above. Brown also rejects a gnostic reading of John. He explains Jesus' involvement in the world. Brown (1971a:cxv) writes:

The Son of Man has come down from heaven (iii 13), the Word has become flesh (i 14), with the purpose of offering salvation to men. The culmination of his career is when he is lifted up towards heaven in death and resurrection to draw all men to himself (xii 32). There is a constant contrast in John between two worlds: one above, the other below (iii 3, 31, viii 23); a sphere that belongs to Spirit, and a sphere that belongs to flesh (iii 6, vi 63). Jesus brings the life of the other world, 'eternal life', to the men of this world; and death has no power over this life (xi 25).

Hurtado (2003:360) also explains in detail that the Johannine Christ is regarded as God. The Divinity of Christ is emphasised throughout the Gospel of John. In John's circle of believers, Jesus was regarded as the One from God, even as the true Son of God. This was even more radical in light of the Jewish background: "As we note shortly, the Johannine believers attributed to Jesus a status in their religious life and thought that exceeds anything we know of by way of analogy in the impressive Jewish traditions about messiahs or other agents of God of that or subsequent periods."

Von Wahlde (2010a:425ff) engages the Gospel of John from the perspective of three different editions. It is important for him to elucidate that the third edition explains that Jesus is the Son of God and One with God the Father, but also that the Son and the Father must be distinguished. Many of the pericopes in the third edition regard Jesus as *Theos*. Although he does regard the Gospel of John as an edited document, he accepts that the development in the views of Jesus does not reject him as *Theos*.

Calvin accepted the view that Christ is One with the Father. However, he explained that Christ, in his humanity, is not the fullness of his Divinity. He is verily God and true human without any sin. The fullness of his Divinity is not revealed in his humanity. This is called the extra-Calvinisticum. Calvin (11:XIV) does not reject the oneness of the Divine Christ with God the Father. As a Calvinist, Heyns (1978:239-237) fully agrees that Christ is truly human and Divine. He explains that Nicaea is not limited in time but a true biblical confession. Jonker (1977:185-194) refers to the role of Christ as Mediator, for He is both human and Divine and the Mediator between the sinner and God. The view of the systematic theologian Van de Beek (1998:71) is extremely important. He opines that Athanasius was correct. It is all about a single *i*: *Homouosios* and *homoiousios*. One cannot separate Christ and the eternal God.

The Orthodox Church also always held the doctrine of the incarnation as essential. In this confession the church proclaimed that Jesus Christ is not only a devout spiritual leader or a philosophical teacher of ethics, but He is the true Son of God who became Human. This church fully accepts his Divinity.

It is also very important to regard the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as essential. It is the Holy Spirit who confesses to the glory of Christ. It is clear that the Holy Spirit in the unity with the Father and the Son leads the church to the magnificent proclamation that God is One and Christ is One with God.



Tachin (2022:80) shows that Stott viewed Christ as God and that he was of the opinion that Christ knew that He is God, contrary to Wright's opinion who challenges that view. Beasley-Murray (1999:16) writes:

The life of Jesus, of whom the Gospel will tell, is set in relation to the God of eternity, who is the Lord of the ages, Creator of all, Sustainer of all, and Redeemer of all. He in whom the Word took flesh is presented as the divinely appointed Mediator in all the works of God: he is Mediator of creation and new creation, and in and through both, the Mediator of revelation.

These theologians refer to the Gospel of John in this regard. In engaging the challenges, one refers to the Gospel of John.

Exegetical evaluation of essential texts in the Gospel of John

John 10:33-36

John 10:33-36 is a challenging text in terms of the way in which Jesus refutes the Jewish view that his claim to be God is blasphemy. Jesus refers to others who, by way of the law, are also regarded as gods; they must, therefore, accept his claim. Nagel (2019:579) regards this as evidence that Jesus is not *Theos*:

The fact that the redactor portrays Jesus as using the concept of the *Logos* to claim sonship of *Theos* should be enough proof that neither Jesus nor the redactor conceptualise Jesus as being *Theos*. Both *Theos* judging deities (cf. Ps 81:1) and the scribe judging the rulers to be gods and sons of the most High represent judgment calls, based on the *Logos*. This notion is repeated in John 12:48. Jesus says that those who reject him and fail to receive his "words" (τὰ ῥήματα), by which he judges, will be judged on the last day by the spoken *Logos*. The distinction drawn between τὰ ῥήματα and ὁ λόγος is important.

However, in light of the many other evidences in John, where Jesus is regarded as *Theos*, one must understand that this is an ironic way of refuting the Jews' argument. First, Brown (1971a:409-410) opines that Jesus uses rabbinic rules of hermeneutics, namely the difference between applied and proper meaning. Secondly, Brown refers to the *a minori ad maius* rabbinic argument, meaning that He actually refutes them by proclaiming that He is God. Jesus is more than those who could report on the law by means of the word of the judges and if they could be called gods He even much more.

Schnackenburg (1980:311) explains that Jesus is not a god in the sense of the gods in the Psalm 82/81:6, to which he refers, but that he is, in fact, more than them. This also implies that he is God against the Jews who rejected his claim. Schnackenburg (1980:311) writes: "If even those who receive God's word are called 'gods' and 'sons of the Most High,' with how much more right should not he, whom God himself sent as the one who transmits God's words and his final and perfect revelation (cf. 3:34) say of himself: 'I am the son of God!'"

Logos in John 1:1

Nagel (2019:577) rejects the view that *Logos* refers to Christ as God:

Hence, it is reasonable and fair to infer that the *Logos* is not *Theos*, but rather that the essential substance of *Theos* (life and light) morphed by means of the *Logos* to become flesh – flesh that radiates the glory of a father's only son. It is at this juncture that the second problem becomes important: To what extent is the *Logos* Jesus, specifically Jesus as the



Christos and Kyrios? A question one must ask is: Why would it have been necessary for the redactor to perceive the *Logos* as “being” equal to Jesus? Why did the redactor not simply say: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός, καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός (“in the beginning was Jesus, the Christ, and Jesus the Christ was with *Theos*, and *Theos* was Jesus the Christ”)? The answer is obvious: he did not conceptualise the *Logos* as being Jesus Christ.

Van de Beek (1998:113) totally differs from Nagel and shows how the relation of Christ with God as One is already present in the Word in John 1:1-2. Jesus is One with the Father and he proceeds from the Father in will, work, and authorisation (Van de Beek, 1998:117).

It is crucial to refer to John 1:1-2. It is clear that the *Logos* is an essential concept. It was known in classical literature. John establishes a relation with the *Logos* and Christ. The *Logos* is clearly God. Christ is God. Not all agree with this interpretation. Nagel differs, as explained earlier. For him, the *Logos* is a reference to the substance of God light and life of God, but not Christ. He is of the opinion that the author would refer to Jesus in the sentence and not *Logos*, if he had Jesus in mind. This view has no regard for metaphorical speech. Schnackenburg (1968:234-235) explains the background of the *Logos* hymn, which he does not regard as a gnostic hymn but as an early confession of Christians. For him, there is no doubt that *Logos* refers to Christ as God. Schnackenburg (1968:234) writes: “The *Logos* is God as truly as he with whom he exists in the closest union of being and life.” According to Brown (1971a:5), the *Logos* clearly refers to Christ and He is *Theos*. The translation, the “Word was God”, is totally acceptable to him and, when Thomas confesses “My God”, it is regarded to include Jesus (20:28). Schnackenburg (1971a:5) continues: “These statements represent the Johannine affirmative answer to the charge made against Jesus in the Gospel that he was wrongly making himself God (x 33, v 18).” Brown (1971a:1-18) explains that, in the past, references were made to the fact that the prologue is different from the rest of the Gospel of John and that it is also in poetic form. One may, however, regard this as evidence that *Logos* refers to Christ. Brown (1971a:36) writes:

The editorial expansion of the hymn in vs. 18 is not lacking in adroitness; the editor has managed to incorporate in it several inclusions with v. 1. Just as in vs. 1 the Word was in God’s presence, so in 18 the only Son is ever at the Father’s side. It is the unique relation of the Son to the Father, so unique that John can speak of ‘God the only Son’ that makes his revelation the supreme revelation.

Phillips (1989:16) shows how radical this confession of the author as Jew is in the Gospel. Theobald (2009:109) regards the prolegomena as proclaiming the mystery of Christ as Divine and human. Gieschen (2021:7) explains how the *Logos* Christology must be viewed in the sense of the theophany of the Word in the Old Testament and not in the sense of wisdom. Bruner (2012:4) is confident that the prologue deals with the true God and that Jesus’ deity is beyond doubt. Hurtado (2003:368) refers to Jesus’ “cosmic priority and heavenly origins” in this regard. Marshall (2004:492-494) has no doubt that the *Logos* refers to Christ Jesus. In his incarnation, Jesus is God who reveals the salvation. Klink III (2016:91-92) makes it very clear that the reference to the *Logos* is to Christ and that He is not a lesser god, but that he is proclaimed as *Theos* in the remainder of the Gospel. It should be acknowledged that the *Logos* and *Theos* contain the same attributes and qualities. Matera (2007:263) opines that one must take John 1:1 together with the claim of Jesus that He and the Father are One in John 8:58 and 10:30. This reveals that Jesus is the “incarnation of the pre-existent Word of God”. Von Wahlde (2010b:2) emphasises that Jesus “is” regarded as the “Word of God”. Dunn (1996:239) does not hesitate to write: “Without doubt John 1.1-18 expresses the most powerful Word-Christology in the NT. Here, beyond dispute, the Word is pre-existent, and Christ is the pre-existent Word incarnate.”



Beasley-Murray (1999:16) explains that

[t]he *Logos* is the source of all life and light in the world. The response among the nations to the activity of the *Logos* was, alas, no more fruitful than it was among Israel; one may also add that it was no less positive among them than in Israel! But the *Logos* was not discouraged; on the contrary, he involved himself with the life of the world in an ultimate manner: he became flesh that the glory of God might be revealed to all flesh. So through the universal embrace of his incarnate life and ministry, the way was made for the scattered children of God in all the earth to be united into one (cf. 11:52; 12:31-32).

I am (John 8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19)

Jesus uses the phrase *ego eimi* (I am) many times when He refers to Himself. Again, it is a reference to *Theos*. In Exodus 3, God refers to Himself as I am (who I am). In John, Jesus takes it upon Himself, especially in John 18:5-9, when they came to arrest Him after they had sung the God is I am. Jesus refers to Himself as I am. Brown (1971a:533-538) explains that the *ego eimi* references in John (8:24; 8:28; 8:58; 13:19) have special implications. The reference to YHWH in the Old Testament as “I am” is extremely important (Brown, 1971a:535-536).

Chapple (2022:109) explains correctly that the “I am” reference of light must be understood in view of the feast of the tabernacles and, therefore, a reference to God. According to Brown (1971a:537), it is clear that Jesus is regarded as Divine in his usage of the “I am” saying, as in many Old Testament references to YHWH in this regard. Schnackenburg (1980:201) is clearly also of the opinion that the “I am” sayings have an Old Testament background and that they refer to YHWH as the One who claims that He is “I am”. There can be no doubt that these Christological references imply that Jesus is *Theos*.

Barret (1976:60) writes:

For John, Jesus’ sonship does indeed involve a metaphysical relationship with the Father. The charge that Jesus, by claiming to be the Son of God and work continuously with him, makes himself equal to God, is never rebutted. Undoubtedly, he believes that the Son of God who was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth inhabited eternity with the Father.

Even Von Walhde (2010:425-426), with his views on different editions of John, is clearly of the opinion that Jesus’ reference to “I am” links him to YHWH. His oneness with the Father is not in dispute. Hurtado (2003:371) also agrees that Jesus’ reference as “I am” clearly has an Old Testament background and explains that Jesus should be regarded in the same way as YHWH in the Old Testament. It is “attributing to Jesus a unique and utterly superior status and significance” (Hurtado, 2003:372). Matera (2007:290) refers to these texts that Jesus is One with the Father and fully reveals the Father. Klink III (2016:311) includes the important aspect that the belief in Jesus for salvation is linked to him as “I am”, implying that he is like YHWH. Bruner (2012:522) has no doubt that Jesus is “as ultimate as God’s Single Personal Representative on Earth”. In these references, Theobald (2009:580) perceives the revelation of Jesus as God. Phillips (1989:165) gives full evidence of the Divinity of Jesus as proclaimed by the Holy Spirit.

Beasley-Murray (1999:140) writes:

Powerful as these expressions of Christology are, we are constantly to bear in mind that they are all linked with the soteriological interest of the Evangelist. This applies, as we saw, even to the “I am” sayings of vv 24, 28, 58, rooted as they are in the OT revelation of God, in contexts of assurance of the care of God for his people and his sovereign and



exclusive power to save. In them we see again the thrust in this Gospel of salvation as life through Christ, made possible for the world through the “lifting up” of Christ (v 28). From beginning to end, the Fourth Gospel is concerned to set forth Jesus as the Revelation of the Father and one with the Father, but always with a view to making plain his role as Mediator of salvation – and of judgment, where man so insists.

The Father and I am one: 5:19 and 14:9

There are many instances in John where the unity between the Father and the Son is clearly explained. One can refer to the following texts:

5:19ff

Brown (1971a:218) clearly shows that the reference to Jesus and the Father is the basis for the later confession of the church that the Father and Son have one nature and one principle of operation. Schnackenburg (1980:103) shows how Jesus explains that his unity with the Father is such that he does nothing out of his own accord. This unity is total and unique. Barret (1976:216) regards it as a complete reflection of the Father’s activity. Marshall (2004:499) emphasises that Jesus has the “divine prerogatives of judging and conferring life”. Hurtado (2003:373-374) also explains the relation of the Father and the Son as intimate. The Son is obedient to the Father but also One with the Father. Klink III (2016:285) refers to the fact that this holds clear implications for the confession of the Trinity. Although the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son, their unity is obvious. According to Von Wahlde (2010a:426), John’s pericopes emphasise the equality of the Son and the Father. In worshipping Jesus, the Father is also worshipped.

14:9

Brown (1971b:632) explains that the unity of God and Jesus is clearly explained, although he is careful not to over-extend the reference to metaphysical implications. However, it is high Christology. It primarily has to do with Jesus’ mission to human beings. Schnackenburg (1982) explains that the unity between the Father and the Son is such that the Father is “visible” and fully present in Jesus. According to Klink III (2016:620), the Trinitarian God cannot be perceived more clearly than in Christ: “In the person of Jesus, the Father could not have been more fully made known or shown.”

Dunn (1996:63) explains that it is not possible to view the references to Jesus as Son of God as evidence that he himself knew that he is the Son of God. One should understand that there were many references to sons of god at the time of the New Testament. Dunn shows that high Christology was evident in the Christian community from the very beginning. The later development of Jesus in his relationship with the Father is also evidence of a high Christology in the Gospel of John.

Beasley-Murray (1999:80) writes: “We are driven back to the thought of the prologue, where the *Logos* is one with God and Mediator of creation, so that in him was the life of humanity; so also the Son in his ministry in the flesh and in the Spirit is mediator of the new creation (1:3-4).” According to Beasley-Murray (1999:228), since Jesus as the Way is the mediator of the truth of God and of life from God, to know him is to know the Father. The Son of God acts like the Father, emphasising the unity of the Father and the Son (Gieschen, 2021:21-22). The radical claim of Jesus that those who see him see the Father brings one to the realm of God. Thus, God is known (Bruner 2012:815).



The Father sent me

The subordination of Jesus to the Father does not diminish his glory. There is a certain tension in the Gospel of John concerning this. Hurtado (2003:396), however, explains that Jesus' humanity is not that of a god but that his Divinity is not diminished, although his humanity is an essential embodiment for the salvation. Matera (2007:316) explains that John refers to Jesus as the *locus* of salvation, the one who reveals God being One with God. Barret (1976:383) refers to the decisive revelation of God in Jesus.

My Lord and my God (John 20:28)

Nagel (2019:580) challenges the view that Thomas refers, in this instance, to Jesus as God: "The utterance by Thomas is hardly proof that Jesus was conceptualised as being *Theos*. It is much easier to argue that the dominant imagery in the Fourth Gospel is the father-son relationship between *Theos* and Jesus, according to which Jesus is the son and *Theos* is the father. This culminates in the utterance of Thomas, because at that point the Logos dwelled within him."

Gieschen (2012:3-4) correctly points out that one cannot accept Bousset's view that, under the influence of polytheistic religion, Thomas' proclamation was included and that it does not refer to One God but that one must accept Hurtado's view that early Christians honoured Jesus as God. Van der Merwe (2019:12) regards the confession as the acknowledgement of the theophany of Jesus as God.

The Gospel of John is a circular composition. It starts with the *Logos* as Christ as God and ends with the confession of Thomas My Lord and my God. The circle is complete: Christ is *Theos*. Brown (1971b:1047) regards this as an exclamation, as an extreme Christological pronouncement. Thomas clearly confesses that Jesus is Lord and God. It becomes the confession of the Christian community and refers to the beginning of the Gospel.

Gieschen (2012:5) correctly refers to Thomas' confession as a culmination of the confession of Peter, that Jesus is the Messiah and the centurion, that Jesus is the Son of God. Moloney (1998:177) refers to different views on Thomas' confession, but he opines that the beloved disciple who composed the Gospel wanted to magnify Jesus as God.

Schnackenburg (1982:332) finds clear evidence in Thomas' confession that Jesus is regarded as *Theos*: "The personal tone due to the twice occurring *mou* is not to be ignored: Thomas found his Lord and his God in the risen one, whom he recognises as the crucified and, to him, the well-known earthly Jesus, and yet another whom he understands to belong wholly to God." Thomas totally accepts him as God (Schnackenburg, 1982:333).

Hurtado (2003:369) emphasises that Thomas acknowledges Jesus as God. For him, this also completes the gospel and that Jesus does not have to claim that He is God, but that it was his right from the beginning.

Matera (2007:287) regards Thomas' confession as the culmination of John's Christology: "Those who confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (20:31) also know that he is their Lord and their God."

Barret (1976:476-477) opines that this is the climax of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is regarded as God, as in the LXX, where Lord and God are referred to as one. Marshall (2004:515) regards Jesus as "God", as confessed by Thomas, but he opines that this does not mean that there are two Gods. Jesus refers to the Father as God. He is obedient to the Father. This does not downgrade his Divinity but, in this regard, the extra Calvinisticum is helpful. Jesus is fully God, but, in his humanity, he does not reveal his full Divinity.



Von Wahlde (2010a:426) makes an essential observation: “The words of Thomas are simply unambiguous. He and the Johannine community patently apply titles otherwise reserved for God the Father to Jesus.” Phillips (1989:386) regards this as the confession of Jesus as God after the evidence of the resurrection. Thomas’ proclamation is both general and personal. It has meaning for all. Jesus is proclaimed as “Lord” and “God” for Thomas and everyone else (Klink III 2016:879). Bruner (2012:1188) views this confession as the climax of the New Testament faith that Jesus is God.

Beasley-Murray (1999:385) explains:

So it comes about that the most outrageous doubter of the resurrection of Jesus utters the greatest confession of the Lord who rose from the dead. His utterance does not simply acknowledge the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, but expresses its ultimate meaning, i.e., as revelation of who Jesus is.

Hermeneutical engagement with the Gospel of John

All this may be true, but what are the hermeneutical implications of Jesus as God. Should it not be evaluated in the early classical domain. In this respect, one may refer to Lampe who regards the references to Jesus as part of the Hellenistic background. The later reference to Jesus in the confession of Nicaea is regarded as a late reference. Although the Hellenistic background should be taken into account, the confession of Christ as *Theos* who became human should be acknowledged. It is not limited in time. It is not disregarding the essence of the opinions.

Dunn (1996:254) opines that the Christological views regarding Christ certainly developed, but only in the late development does John fully recognise him as eternal pre-existent Son of God. This does not mean that the Christian community did not regard Christ as totally divine and different from all other divine entities in the New Testament times.

The other background to John’s gospel is Judaism. Many issues are clear from this background. Brown shows extensively how John not only refers to many references in the Old Testament, but also implies that the Jewish environment has clear meaning for the gospel. Although the Trinity is not radically mentioned in John, the implications are clear, namely that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is God, but also One. There can be no doubt that Jesus is “I am” as *YHWH*. Marshall (2004:495) also views the relation of Jesus and the Jews as essential for understanding the Gospel. Jesus, as the Messiah, is also the King of Israel. Marshall (2004:511) refers to the fact that the Jewish concept of the two ages, the present and the one to come, is taken over but raised anew as the dualism of the world and God.

Nagel does not view that John confesses Christ as both *Theos* and Son of God obedient to the Father. However, John clearly views the Son as One with the Father, as God in fullness but also in his humanity as Son of God obedient to the Father. This is not a contradiction. It is a wonderful confession of the wonder of the incarnation. To reject the view that Christ is *Theos* does not do justice to the confession in John that Christ is indeed One with the Father. Many years later, in 345 and 425, the church correctly confessed at Nicaea that Christ is God from God, light from light, verily God from verily God and, at Chalcedon, that Christ’s two natures were *Asungutos atreptos adiaretos axoristos*.

Jesus was not a tentative character but the true Son of God who proclaimed this as Divine Person (Colwell, 1981:7). Chapple (2022:119) explains how evident the references to Christ as God are in light of the challenges by monotheistic Jews and John’s answer in the Gospel to the changes, by emphasising that Jesus Christ and the Father are One. The acceptance of Jesus by Jewish Christians attests to this. Chapple (2022:119) writes: “... a sizeable group of earliest Christians



perceived that Jesus claimed and showed himself to be truly divine, and they thought that God had vindicated this claim by raising Jesus from the dead. From a historical perspective, this is the best explanation for the origin of divine Christology.”

Conclusion

The evidence is overwhelming. The author of the Gospel of John regards Jesus as Lord and God: from the beginning, when Jesus is regarded as the *Logos* and One with God, to the final climax, where Thomas proclaims Jesus as Lord and God. The challenges to these confessions were engaged and not accepted. The Gospel of John has a circular structure which proves that Jesus should be regarded as One with God. The Triune Godhead must be acknowledged. In the present debate it is essential to proclaim that Christ is One with God. Especially regarding the Judaistic background it is essential to note that Jesus was honoured in the same way as *YHWH* by early Jewish Christians. This has implications for the church at present. In the modern secularist world, the church should remain true to the essential confession that the Triune God is One. To honour Christ as Son of God, One with the Father and the Holy Spirit is glorious and true. To be the verily Church of God this confession must always show the way in the present world. The Gospel of John is clear on this foundation.

References

- Barret, C. K. (1976). *The gospel according to St John: An introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek texts*. London: SPCK.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. (1999). *John. Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 36*. Dallas: Word.
- Brown, R.E. (1971a). *The Gospel according to John (I-XII)*. London: Chapman. (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 29).
- Brown, R.E. (1971b). *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*. London: Chapman. (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 29A).
- Bruner, F.D. (2012). *The Gospel of John: A commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Calvin *Institutes* Book 11:XIV.
- Chapple, A. (2022). Giving John a fair go: Christology in John and the Synoptics, *The Reformed Theological Review*, 81(2), 97-119. Available at: <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIACO221129000781&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)
- Colwell, G. (1981). The divinity of Jesus Christ. *Crux*, 17(1), 2-7. Available at: <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001986643&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
- Dunn, J. D. G. (1996). *Christology in the making: A New Testament inquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*. 2nd edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Gieschen, C.A. (2021). The YHWH Christology of the Gospel of John. *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 85(1), 3-22. Available at: <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIAZI210227000130&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
- Heick, O. W. (1973). *A history of Christian thought. Vol 1*. Philadelphia: Fortress.



- Heyns, J.A. (1978). *Dogmatiek*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.
- Hurtado, L. W. (2003). *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Jonker, W. D. (1977). *Christus die Middelaar. Wegwysers in die dogmatiek 2*. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel.
- Juanda, E. S. & Chia, P.S. (2023). A biblical response to Jehovah Witness in Surabaya, Indonesia. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 104(1), 1-14. Available at: <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIgKP230213000722&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)
- Klink III, E.W. (2016). *John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.
- Lampe, P. (2017). Caesar, Moses and Jesus as “God”, “godlike” or “God’s Son”: Constructions of divinity in paganism, Philo and Christianity in the Greco-Roman world. In: Tolmie, D.F. and Venter, R. (Eds). *Making sense of Jesus: Experiences, interpretations and identities*. Bloemfontein: Sun Press, pp. 7-27. [University of the Free State Theological Explorations vol. 2].
- Marshall, I.H. (2004). *New Testament theology: Many witnesses, one Gospel*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP.
- Matera, F.J. (2007). *New Testament theology: Exploring diversity and unity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press.
- Moloney, F.J. 1998. *Glory not dishonour: Reading John 13-21*. Minneapolis: Fortress
- Nagel, P. (2019). Problematizing the Divinity of Jesus: Why Jesus is not θεός. *Neotestamentica*, 53(3), 557-584.
- Phillips, J. (1989). *Exploring the Gospels: John*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.
- Schnackenburg, R. (1968). *The Gospel according to St John. Volume 1. Introduction and commentary on Chapters 1-4*. Translated by Kevin Smyth. Wellwood: Burns and Oates.
- Schnackenburg, R. (1980). *The Gospel according to St John. Volume 2. Commentary on Chapters 5-12*. Translated by Cecily Hastings et al. London: Burns and Oates.
- Schnackenburg, R. (1982). *The Gospel according to St John. Volume 3. Commentary on Chapters 13-21*. Translated by David Smith and G.A. Kon. London: Burns and Oates.
- Tachin, P.S. (2022). The finality of Christ in Stott’s Christology. *Unio cum Christo*, 8(2), pp. 63-81. Available at: <<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIgU0230206000113&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).
- Theobald, M. (2009). *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Kapitel 1-12*. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet. [Regensburg Neues Testament].
- Van de Beek, A. (1998). *Jezus Kurios: De Christologie als hart van de theologie*. Kampen: Kok. (Spreekwoord over God 1.1).
- Van der Merwe, D.G. (2019). The divinity of Jesus in the Gospel of John: The “lived experiences” it fostered when the text was read. *HTS Theological Studies*, 75(1), 1-13. Available at:



<https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ufs.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn4596377&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

Von Wahlde, U.C. (2010a). *The Gospel and letters of John. Volume 1. Introduction, analysis, and reference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. [Eerdmans Critical Commentary].

Von Wahlde, U.C. (2010b). *The Gospel and letters of John. Volume 2. Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. [Eerdmans Critical Commentary].

Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



This article is open-access and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence

The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.