



Wilson Paroschi

Incarnation and Covenant
in the Prologue to the
Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–18)



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Preface

This volume contains a somewhat modified text of a doctoral dissertation presented to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, on October 31, 2003. In addition to a number of changes involving matters of style and argument, the material has been shortened by the omission of two appendices. No conceptual change, however, has been made.

It would be appropriate at this point to express a word of gratitude to my *Doktorvater*, Robert M. Johnston, who guided this work to completion with consummate patience and skill, and to my committee members, Larry W. Richards, for his insight and counsel far beyond academic matters, and Jon Paulien, who stirred my interest in John's Gospel and whose academic rigor was always a challenge and an inspiration. My examiners, Peter M. van Bemmelen and Steve Moyise, also deserve a special recognition. Their friendly attitude made me feel at ease at my defense, even when we disagreed on a few points. It was Steve Moyise, from University College Chichester, England, who first encouraged me to publish the dissertation.

I am also pleased to record my gratefulness to distinguished Johannine scholar Hartwig Thyen, Emeritus Professor of the University of Heidelberg, for his willingness in the summer 2002 to read specific parts of my dissertation and for several hours of fruitful talks on a number of relevant issues. At that time, Prof. Thyen was just about to finish writing a massive commentary on the Fourth Gospel, and I was indeed fortunate to have access to the first part of that work still in its manuscript form. The commentary has just been published, and despite the fact it has undergone some editing and condensing, all references here have been updated according to the printed version.

Several others have also contributed to this work in one way or another, and I am more than happy to acknowledge them: Andrews University Emerita Professor Leona Running, for valuable help with the Syriac version; my PhD colleagues, Martin Pröbstle and Erhard Gallos, for insightful exchanges, mutual encouragement, and especially their assistance with those German citations that seemed to require nothing less than a German mind to understand; and Professor Nancy Vyhmeister, for fine-tuning my English and making it more idiomatic.

A final word of appreciation goes to my family. My daughters, Kéldie and Keilyn, have helped me much more than they can now imagine or comprehend. Their love and joy have enriched my life beyond measure. Above all, I am earnestly grateful to my dear wife, Eliane, for everything she is and has done to me. It is to these three women that I dedicate this book.

Wilson Paroschi
June 2005

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	Bible Amplifier
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich's <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3 ^d ed.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETHL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium
BHTh	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>Bijdr</i>	<i>Bijdragen</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BiSe	Biblical Seminar
<i>BiTr</i>	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BU	Biblische Untersuchungen
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
CBETH	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CBSS	Cassell Biblical Studies Series

CEP	Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives
CEv	Cahiers évangile
<i>CIW</i>	<i>Classical Weekly</i>
CNT	Companions to the New Testament
CPNIVC	College Press NIV Commentary
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>DBS</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément</i>
<i>Did</i>	<i>Didaskalia</i>
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i>
EBS	Encountering Biblical Studies
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Evangelical Journal</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EstB</i>	<i>Estudios Biblicos</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
EtB	Études Bibliques
<i>EtCl</i>	<i>Études Classiques</i>
<i>FilNeo</i>	<i>Filología Neotestamentaria</i>
FPE	Fuentes Patristicas: Estudios
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FTS	Frankfurter Theologische Studien
GSL	Geistliche Schriftlesung
GTS	Gettysburg Theological Studies
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HC	Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
HSMS	Harvard Semitic Monograph Series
HT	Helps for Translators
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Imman</i>	<i>Immanuel</i>
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
IVPNTCS	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary Series
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JDTh</i>	<i>Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Kairos</i>	<i>Kairos: Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
<i>Kerux</i>	<i>Kerux</i>
<i>LV</i>	<i>Lumière et vie</i>
<i>Mar</i>	<i>Marianum</i>
MLBS	Mercer Library of Biblical Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
<i>NAWG</i>	<i>Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	Die neue Echter Bibel
<i>Neotest</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
<i>NIB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NTA	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTG	New Testament Guides
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTP	New Testament Profiles
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
ÖTKNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische studiën
PBTS	Paternoster Biblical and Theological Studies
PC	Proclamation Commentaries
PE	<i>Pro Ecclesia</i>
PEGLBS	<i>Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society</i>
Presb	<i>Presbyterion</i>
PRS	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RefR	<i>Reformed Review</i>
RestQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RHPPhR	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RivBib	<i>Rivista biblica</i>
RNBC	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
RSR	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RThom	<i>Revue thomiste</i>
RThPh	<i>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</i>
RTL	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SBFA	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCC	Studies in Creative Criticism
ScEs	<i>Science et Esprit</i>
SHVL	Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Lund
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJTh	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTI	Studies in New Testament Interpretation
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SPIB	Scripta pontificii instituti biblici
SPNT	Studies on Personalities of the New Testament
SPS	Sacra Pagina Series
SPSH	Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities
StNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
StO	<i>Studium Ovetense</i>

<i>StTh</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
StUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>SVTQ</i>	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ThBeitr</i>	<i>Theologische Beiträge</i>
<i>ThD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
ThHK	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
ThKNT	Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>ThQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>ThR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>ThViat</i>	<i>Theologia Viatorum</i>
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TTL	Theological Translation Library
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TWAT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i>
TzB	Texte zur Bibel
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WPC	Westminster Pelican Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZKTh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

1

Introduction

The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, as John 1:1-18 is usually called,¹ is one of the best known passages in the New Testament. Behind its simplicity of language lies a density of thought that has attracted the attention of a host of Bible students and exerted a considerable influence on Christian theology.² The Prologue, with its specific character and function, introduces the book of John.³ It is not merely a rhetorical introduction such as Heb 1:1-4, or a literary preface like Luke 1:1-4, explaining how the author came to write his book. In John, the explanation for the writing of the Gospel is left to the end (20:30-31). As has been said, the Prologue is “a curtain-raiser for the Gospel, like the overture of an opera,”⁴ in the sense that it introduces the major themes which are explored

¹There are exceptions. L. Paul Trudinger argues that the Prologue originally included 3:13-21, 31-36, but not 1:6-8, 15 (“The Prologue of John’s Gospel: Its Extent, Content, and Intent,” *RTR* 33 (1974): 11-17. Stephen S. Smalley, though considering John 1:1-18 as a literary unit, refers to the entire chap. 1 as “the Prologue” (*John: Evangelist and Interpreter*, 2^d ed., NTP [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998], 135-137). For Ben Witherington III, the Prologue consists only of vss. 1-14 (*John’s Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995], 47-59). In the early church, Heraclion, the gnostic and earliest commentator on John, seems to have already anticipated the view that the Prologue comprises vss. 1-18, though in liturgical practice throughout the centuries the reading of the Prologue used to stop at vs. 14. This practice probably goes back to Origen, who held that vss. 16-18 continue the witness of the Baptist (Benedict T. Viviano, “The Structure of the Prologue of John [1:1-18]: A Note,” *RB* 105 [1998]: 177, 182).

²C. K. Barrett declares: “What is hardly open to question is the universal instinct of Christendom, which has found here the climax of New Testament Christology, itself the edge of the New Testament message” (*New Testament Essays* [London: SPCK, 1972], 27).

³For Elizabeth Harris, John’s Prologue may have been composed following Graeco-Roman literary convention of introducing epic dramas with a πρόλογος (*Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 12-16). The variety of definition and terminology of ancient prologues, however, something that Harris willingly acknowledges, points to a certain fluidity and development which seems to weaken the case for any acquaintance on the part of the fourth evangelist and his readers with those forms and functions.

⁴Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 81. See also Clayton R. Bowen: “Prologue: the word suggests the preface to a play; just as clearly the verses themselves suggest a striking of the great major chords whose harmony is to vibrate until the last curtain falls” (“The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material,” *JBL* 49 [1930]: 298).

throughout the whole work.¹ It is also “an instruction to the reader as to how the entire Gospel should be read and understood”;² that is, it sets forth the perspective which governs John’s presentation of Jesus.³

These eighteen verses, however, to use the words of Enrique López, contain “a small world of problems.”⁴ There seems to be no area within the wide range of biblical studies in which this passage offers no difficulty.⁵ It is perhaps the most controversial passage in John’s Gospel, if not in the New Testament.⁶

¹This is why classicist Heinrich Lausberg calls John’s Prologue an “exordium” in the ancient rhetorical sense of offering an introductory summary of what was to follow (“Der Johannes-Prolog: Rhetorische Befunde zu Form und Sinn des Textes,” *NAWG*, no. 5 [1984]: 193). See also his “Prolog J 1:1-18 und ‘corpus narrativum’ J 1:19–20:29 als grundständig einander zugeordnete Teile des Johannes-Evangeliums: Rhetorische Befunde,” *NAWG*, no. 1 (1987): 1-7; Simon R. Valentine, “The Johannine Prologue: A Microcosm of the Gospel,” *EQ* 68 (1996): 291-304; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:333-334, 338. According to D. Moody Smith, the Prologue can be described as a summation of John’s narrative, as well as of the entire Gospel message (*John*, ANTC [Nashville: Abingdon, 1999], 63). For examples of the thematic interrelationship between the Prologue and the Gospel, see R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, IBT (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 117-119.

²Hartwig Thyen, “Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium,” *ThR* 39 (1974): 223 (all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated).

³“From the outset, the reader understands Jesus in the light of his origin with God, his role in creation, the incarnation, and his mission to reveal the Father. Jesus’ role is also defined in relation to Moses and John the Baptist, who will bear witness to him. The opposition is established between those who reject Jesus and those who believe on his name, and the latter are identified as the ‘children of God’” (Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 119-120). E. F. Scott comments: The Prologue was written “with the express intention of placing the reader at the right point of view for understanding the story which is to follow” (*The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology*, 2^d ed. [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908], 145). Many scholars refer to the Prologue as the “key” to the understanding of John (see R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel: A Commentary* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1956], 78).

⁴Enrique López, “Dos siglos de crítica literaria en torno al Prólogo de San Juan,” *StO* 1 (1973): 135.

⁵See the helpful introductory discussion by Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual. Mit einer Bibliographie über den Zeitraum 1986-1998*, BEThL 162 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 57-70.

⁶“The Johannine Prologue is one of the most important passages in the New Testament, but also one of the most controversial” (Morna D. Hooker, “John the Baptist and the Johannine Prologue,” *NTS* 16 [1969-1970]: 354). Already in 1897, Alfred Resch described it as a “riddle” (*Das Kindheitsevangelium nach Lucas und Matthaues*, vol. 5, *Aussercanonische*

More than a century ago, Wilhelm Baldensperger referred to it as “the sphinx at the entrance of the Fourth Gospel.”¹ Exactly because of its mysteries and wonders the Prologue has raised enormous scholarly interest. It is hard to think of another passage that has received so much attention.² The literature on it is so vast that it seems unlikely that any claim to originality can still be made without jeopardizing one’s claim to credibility. There still remain, of course, many problems to be solved, and many things to be said. But perhaps, as John Painter notes, “on the basis of existing evidence, it seems that what can be said with some probability has been said.”³ This is particularly true about the central theme of this passage, on which the following pages offer an introductory discussion, highlighting its significance and centrality in the dynamics of the Prologue, and so laying the foundation for this study.

Paralleltexzte zu den Evangelien, 5 vols., TU 10 [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897], 254), as did Paul Gächter in 1936 (“Strophen im Johannesevangelium,” *ZKTh* 60 [1936]: 105) and Joachim Jeremias in 1967 (*Der Prolog des Johannesevangeliums* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1967]: 8). That this description is still suitable can be seen from a recent article by Stephen J. Patterson, in which he used adjectives such as “mysterious” and “puzzling” to refer to the Prologue, for him “one of the most difficult texts to understand” (“The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and the World of Speculative Jewish Theology,” in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 323).

¹Wilhelm Baldensperger, *Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums: Sein polemisch-apologetischer Zweck* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1898), 1.

²For bibliography, see Edward Malatesta, comp., *St. John’s Gospel 1920-1965: A Cumulative and Classified Bibliography of Books and Periodical Literature on the Fourth Gospel*, AnBib 32 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967); Gilbert van Belle, *Johannine Bibliography 1966-1985: A Cumulative Bibliography on the Fourth Gospel*, BETL 82 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988); Watson E. Mills, ed., *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, *Bibliographies for Biblical Research: New Testament Series*, ed. Watson E. Mills, 21 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 1995); Watson E. Mills, comp., *Index to Periodical Literature on Christ and the Gospels*, NTS 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); idem, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, *Bibliographies for Biblical Research: Periodical Literature for the Study of the New Testament*, ed. Watson E. Mills, 11 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 2002).

³John Painter, “Christology and the History of the Johannine Community in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 460. Anyone wishing to say something new on the Prologue must remember the dictum quoted by W. C. van Unnik in a similar context: “The new things he said were not true and the true things were not new” (“The Purpose of St. John’s Gospel,” in *Studia Evangelica: Papers Presented to the International Congress on “The Four Gospels in 1957” Held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1957*, ed. Kurt Aland, et al., TU 73 [Berlin: Akademie, 1959], 383).

The Theme of the Prologue

The primary focus of this study is the relationship between pre-existence and incarnation in John's Prologue. This, however, presupposes a positive answer to the question whether there is such a relationship at all in the Prologue, especially in view of some recent attempts to empty the incarnation of its significance by denying in one way or another the pre-existence of the Johannine Jesus.¹ It seems, therefore, appropriate to address this question before dealing with the actual problem and purpose of this study.

The Story of Jesus Christ

Though it introduces some of the main themes of the Gospel, the Prologue, as well as the whole Gospel, has only one subject: Jesus Christ. All other themes and concepts must be considered in connection with him. It is to be noted, however, that this subject is not mentioned by name until the end of this introductory passage (1:17).² This is probably deliberate; the human name of Jesus Christ is not used until he actually enters the realm of human existence. Prior to that, while still referring to him in the primeval time of creation, the fourth evangelist employs the unusual and rather controversial title *Logos* (1:1-3, 14). The reason for this will probably remain one of the hidden and intriguing mysteries of this Gospel, whatever may be said of its conceptual background.³ Nevertheless, this title seems to have furnished the author we call John with a means to differentiate between the two modes of Jesus Christ, namely, his divine pre-existence with God and his human existence with humankind. On one hand, therefore, *λόγος* helps to make a distinction; on the other, it establishes the fundamental

¹One example is that of Heidelberg Emeritus Professor Hartwig Thyen, who, at the time I was working on my dissertation, was about to finish writing a comprehensive commentary on the Fourth Gospel, the first part of which still in its manuscript form he kindly shared with me. The commentary has just come out of press (*Das Johannesevangelium*, HNT 6 [Tübingen: Mohr, 2005]), and though it has been edited and abridged, all references here have been updated according to the printed version.

²See Lausberg, "Der Johannes-Prolog," 193.

³Robert Kysar alludes to the "alluring" power of the *Logos* concept in John's Prologue, traditionally by far one of the most disputed issues in the Fourth Gospel's interpretation, with scholars having exhausted every conceivable possibility in an effort to understand its background, meaning, and implications (*The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975], 107).

unity between the One who was before creation with God and the One who came in flesh (vs. 14) to reveal or to explain (ἐξηγήσομαι) God (vs. 18).¹

Be that as it may, what really matters here is that Jesus Christ is introduced in the Prologue framed by two sets of affirmations:² “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God” (vs. 1), and “the Logos was made flesh, and dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth” (vs. 14). In other words, according to John’s Prologue, the Logos who was in the beginning with God, the Logos through whom all things were made (vs. 3), the Logos who was God, “was made flesh.” That is, he moved out of the primeval, cosmic setting into the realm of humankind by taking on the reality of existence as an individual person in a concrete historical situation. This fact is seen by many as the primary issue in John 1:1-18, as well as in the whole Gospel.³ “Who would deny,” asks Ed. L. Miller, “that the advent of the pre-existent and divine Logos into the world at a certain moment in our history is indeed the focus of the Prologue?”⁴

In relation to this point, two extremes have been observed. On one side there are those who emphasize the divinity of the Logos at the expense of his humanity and, on the other, those who insist upon the human existence of the Logos, thus minimizing John’s characterization of him as a divine, pre-existent

¹Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall, NTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 258.

²See Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne M. Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 175-177.

³Rudolf Bultmann is one of the main proponents of this idea. With a language that sounds rather orthodox, he strongly maintains that the theme of the Fourth Gospel is to be found in 1:14a, that is, in the statement that the Logos, who was God, manifested himself in flesh, as a true man (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 62, 62 n. 4, 64, 67-68; idem, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel [London: SCM, 1952-1955], 1:40). According to Bultmann, this fact also explains why the title Logos plays no further role in the rest of the Gospel, for “the Logos is now present as the Incarnate, and indeed it is only as the Incarnate that it is present at all” (*The Gospel of John*, 63).

⁴Ed. L. Miller, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3-4*, NovTSup 60 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 11. Gail R. O’Day concurs: “The Prologue is concerned with two different spheres of God’s presence: the timeless, the sphere of the cosmic Word of God, and the timebound, the sphere of John the Baptist, the world, and the incarnate Word. Establishing the interaction between these two spheres is the overriding concern of the Prologue” (“The Word Become Flesh: Story and Theology in the Gospel of John,” in *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2, “*What Is John?*” ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSymS 7 [Atlanta: Scholars, 1998], 70).

being. The debate is well known and does not need to be addressed here.¹ What concerns us now is how the theme of the incarnation affects the interpretation of the Prologue and, more precisely, of those verses prior to vs. 14.

The Centrality of the Incarnation

First of all, as Friedrich Mildenerger says, “a theological understanding of the Prologue certainly has to start from vss. 14-18.”² This is methodologically correct, for the Prologue, and the Fourth Gospel as a whole, is about Jesus Christ, not about the Logos. Herman Ridderbos agrees: “Jesus Christ is, in essence, the subject of the Prologue, the Logos the predicate. And not the reverse.”³ This means that any reference to the pre-existence of the Logos must be interpreted in the light of the incarnation. “It is only from Jesus Christ as the incarnate Logos,” continues Mildenerger, “that we can also think of something like a *before* the incarnation of the Logos.”⁴ The incarnation does not establish “the confines and limits of the Logos,” as Ernst Käsemann insinuates in order to vindicate his docetic interpretation of Johannine Christology,⁵ but the fourth evangelist is not interested at all in any kind of speculation about the pre-temporal existence of the Logos. Although he begins his book by referring to the being of the Logos with God in the eternity past, John’s mind is already focused on the revelatory aspect of the mission of the Logos among men.⁶ The Logos in the Prologue be-

¹This has been done by several authors, but not always with the meticulous and cogent style of Marianne M. Thompson in *The Incarnate Word: Perspectives on Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).

²Friedrich Mildenerger, *Biblische Dogmatik: Eine biblische Theologie in dogmatischer Perspektive*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991-1993), 1:133.

³Herman Ridderbos, “The Structure and Scope of the Prologue to the Gospel of John,” *NovT* 8 (1966): 52.

⁴Mildenerger, 1:133. Keener surely misses the point when he says that the focus of the Prologue is the deity of the Logos, not his “enfleshment” (1:407).

⁵Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17*, trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 43.

⁶See Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 265. Cullmann’s discussion of the Logos concept is illuminating. Arguing from a salvation-history perspective, he emphasizes that when the evangelist refers to the being of the Logos “in the beginning,” he does so “only in the closest connection with what he says of the further work of Christ,” for the incarnate One, the Son of God, as he appeared in the flesh, is the very center of God’s saving activ-

comes relevant only in connection with what he tells about Jesus Christ. The very purpose of the Gospel endorses this idea: John was written so that not only the messiahship but also the divine origin of the man Jesus Christ might be acknowledged and believed (20:31). In an insightful article, Gail R. O'Day argues that the incarnation of the Logos plays a "pivotal role" in the Fourth Gospel, in the sense that it provides a "hermeneutical principle" on the basis of which only John's theology can be properly understood.¹

This does not mean, however, that the pre-existent Logos in the Prologue should be conceived only as a theological abstraction, as if *λόγος* were nothing more than a mere personification of a philosophical concept, as some, including Mildenerger, argue.² Thyen combines this idea with a doxological understanding of John 1:1-18. He maintains that "the entire Prologue, from the first verse, must be read as a doxological poem on the Incarnate, and not something like a narrative of the prehistory of this incarnation."³ Then, Thyen lists several passages which, he thinks, support the view that there is no "pre-existent Logos" in John's Gospel and that it is the incarnate One, the Jewish man Jesus Christ, that

ity, and as such he "cannot simply have appeared from nowhere" (ibid., 249-250). So, the starting point of John's theology is "a concrete event, the life of Jesus" (263).

¹Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John: Reading the Incarnate Words," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27-32. The centrality of the incarnation in John's theology is further and brilliantly developed by O'Day in another article ("The Love of God Incarnate: The Life of Jesus in the Gospel of John," in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown*, ed. John R. Donahue [Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005], 158-167).

²"We may not and must not simply assume that the *λόγος ἄσαρκος* is a *concretum*, an autonomous subject. There is no doubt that the Logos is linguistically treated and possibly also presented as such. But an interpretation that uses this idea has to pay attention to the fact that Logos, just as Wisdom, is an *abstractum*" (Mildenerger, 1:133). John A. T. Robinson explains the pre-existent Logos as a poetic personification of God's self-expression. "That the Logos came into existence or expression as a person," he says, "does not mean that it was a person before." The incarnation was the union of the anhypostatic (impersonal) Logos with the hypostatic Jesus; this distinction, Robinson thinks, is vital in order to guard John's Christology from the charge of docetism (*The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Coakley [London: SCM, 1985; Oak Park: Meyer-Stone, 1987], 380-381). For Hans Schwarz, the pre-existence of the Logos in John must also be interpreted as an abstraction, a theological concept which was necessary to express that God was indeed fully present in Jesus. "Pre-existence," he says, "does not imply a pre-existent person but the certainty and insistence that that which appeared in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth was indeed of divine origin and had occurred with divine sanction" (*Christology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 235-236).

³Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 74. See also his "Aus der Literatur zum Johannesevangelium," 39:62-63.

is both “pre- and post-existent” (1:15; 6:51; 13:1; 16:17; 17:5).¹ Though it cannot be denied that these passages refer to the pre-existence of Jesus of Nazareth, they do not invalidate a divine and personal understanding of that pre-existence as implied in the statements about the Logos in 1:1-3 and 14. The very notion of incarnation requires such an understanding of pre-existence. And by saying $\acute{\omicron}$ $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$ $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron$, vs. 14 also secures the identity of the pre-existent Logos with the man Jesus Christ (cf. vs. 17).²

There should be no question that, irrespective of historical and philosophical premises, the Logos of vss. 1-3 and 14 is, linguistically as well as theologically, depicted as a person, as an autonomous individual. “That is quite a claim!” exclaims Robert Kysar. Whether one believes it is true or not, he argues,

¹Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 74.

²Thyen (ibid.) also quotes Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley, et al. [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1936-1969], 52), but in a way that seems open to suspicion. It is true that Barth also argues that Jesus Christ is “the content and form” of the pre-existent Logos (ibid., 53), but his emphasis is more on the mystery that involves the divine Word, and not so much a denial of the Word, as in the case of Thyen. Barth acknowledges that “God became man,” but his idea is that one cannot go behind the point of incarnation, a point at which we would have to reckon with God in himself, in his divine, transcendent domain. Thus, under the title $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\omicron\varsigma$, “we pay homage to a *Deus absconditus* and therefore to some image of God which we have made for ourselves” (ibid., 52). Whether Thyen misuses Barth or not, Barth’s philosophical understanding of the biblical God does not seem appropriate either. It ought to be noted that the Fourth Gospel’s portrait of the pre-existent Logos is not the product of our own individual speculations, as “some image of God which we have made for ourselves.” Not to refer to this portrait, no matter the reason, is to compromise the entire Johannine Christology. When John says that “these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (20:31), he means exactly that. Jesus is both God’s Messiah and God’s Son, and in this Gospel there is no hint of adoptionism involving his divine sonship. Even though he had an earthly mother (2:1, 12), he also had a heavenly Father (6:46; 10:15; 12:50; 16:15; 17:11), with whom he had a personal and intimate relationship even before the creation of the world (1:1-3, 18; 17:5). So John himself takes the reader before the point of incarnation, into the heavenly realm, the sphere of God in himself, in order to make clear the full identity of Jesus Christ. If it were not for his docetic view of the Johannine Jesus, one certainly could agree with Käsemann that “judged by the modern concept of reality, our Gospel is more fantastic than any other writing of the New Testament” (*The Testament of Jesus*, 45). Whether John’s Christological claims go back to Jesus himself or are the result of developed tradition, as some have argued (e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980], 31-32), does not affect these considerations. The Johannine Logos is indeed a personal, pre-existent, and divine being, and no other NT writing has had more impact on Christian thinking about these issues than the Fourth Gospel (see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 283).

one must recognize that the Johannine Logos is a person.¹ In order to assimilate this fact, it may be argued that John uses metaphorical, dogmatic, or even mythological language,² but that language cannot be regarded merely as doxological. Doxology is, by definition, an ascription of glory to someone, usually a divine or heavenly being, and there is nothing in vss.1-3 or in the whole Prologue that resembles a doxology, not a single word or expression of praise, either to God or to the Logos.³ Even if there were, however, the jump from doxological statements to the conclusion that the text in question conveys a theological abstraction seems difficult to justify.

Even though the whole Prologue is to be interpreted in the light of the incarnation, the incarnation is not to be used to conceal the paradox of the identity of him who is the subject of this Gospel. As his pre-existence cannot be used to deny the significance of his earthly reality, as if his humanity was merely doctetic, his human existence cannot in itself be used to deny his divinity and personal pre-existence. He is God, and he is man. It is the incarnation that brings these two realities together, and for this reason the incarnation is central to John.⁴ To the evangelist, therefore, the incarnation is not a concept, nor is it an

¹Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), 25. R. V. G. Tasker says: "It is the unique contribution of the Prologue of the Gospel of John, that it reveals the Word of God not merely as an attribute of God, but as a distinct person within the Godhead, dwelling with the Creator before creation began, and acting as the divine agent of creation" (*The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], 42).

²Bultmann says: "He [the Logos] is spoken of as a person, in the language of mythology" (*The Gospel of John*, 19).

³In the NT, there are no fewer than sixteen examples of doxologies: Rom 11:36; 16:25-27; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:20-21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 5:11; 2 Pet 3:18; Jude 24-25; Rev 1:5-6; 5:13; 7:12. The identification of Luke 2:14 and 19:38 is more problematic (see I. Howard Marshall, "Romans 16:25-27: An Apt Conclusion," in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 170-183). According to Jeffrey A. D. Weima, all NT doxologies exhibit a relatively fixed pattern, consisting of four basic elements: the object of praise, the element of praise, the indication of time, and the confirmatory response (*Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings*, JSNTSup 101 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 135-144). None of these elements is found in John's Prologue.

⁴Maybe this explains why there is no reference to the virgin birth in the Fourth Gospel. Not that the concept of incarnation is "difficult to reconcile" with the doctrine of the virgin birth, as claimed by Bultmann (Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, 2 vols., ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller [London: SPCK, 1957-1962], 1:34), but there exists no suggestion of pre-existence as