

“It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you thought only a human being are making yourself God.” (Jn. 10.33) Does John think Jesus is primarily divine and not really human?

The question of Jesus’ identity is central in the Gospel of John, presenting a complex theological perspective that emphasises both His humanity and divinity. The Gospel according to John is distinct from the Synoptic Gospels in both style and content, employing symbolism, metaphors and repetition throughout to reinforce its theological themes, with a heavy focus on Jesus’s divinity. It is argued that John’s emphasis on Jesus’ deity and “high” Christology portray Jesus as primarily divine to the detriment of His humanity. This essay will argue that, although there is a clear focus on Jesus’ divinity in John, this does in no way downplay the humanity that John ascribes to Jesus, and therefore John does not think Jesus is *primarily* divine nor *primarily* human, but rather he highlights a hypostatic union.

The Prologue highlights John’s “high” Christology, immediately revealing that the issue of the identity of Jesus in relation to God will be central to the rest of the Gospel’s story. The Prologue introduces the reader to several key terms like ‘light’, ‘glory’ and ‘life’ when used in reference to the *Logos*, which are of vital importance when exploring Jesus’ identity in later parts of the Gospel.

The first line of the Gospel (according to GNT) goes as follows:

« 1 ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος »

which in the KJV is translated as:

« In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. »

The opening of John begins using the same language as the Book of Genesis, with ‘ἐν ἀρχῇ’ also being used in the Septuagint as ‘in the beginning’. In Genesis, the ‘beginning’ seems to be in reference to the beginning of creation, whereas in John 1, creation is not mentioned until verse 3. This can suggest that John is presenting the λόγος (a very loaded and meaningful term that I will explore further) as being present from the absolute beginning within the sphere of God, highlighting the deity of the Word, which is then reiterated by the sentence ‘the Word was God’.

John uses ‘Logos’ as the word he believes to be best adapted in allowing readers to understand who the person of Christ is. The term’s meaning is varied in the history of Greek, signifying many things such as logic, rhetoric, mathematical principles, propositions, definitions and so on. In the Septuagint ‘Logos’ is used to convey ‘the word of the Lord’.

The word 'Logos' is applied to Christ twice in John 1:1, in reference to His pre-existing, eternal and divine life, and once in verse 14, in reference to His incarnation, i.e. being 'made flesh'. From there on, the term Logos is replaced with the name Jesus Christ, appearing in verse 17. One can interpret this as the historical Person who is the Logos, whose existence is eternal and who is fully divine in essence, becoming human, taking the flesh and the body that the name Jesus Christ refers to in verse 17, therefore being fully human at the same time. In this sense, John is explicit in saying that Jesus is not *primarily* divine, nor *primarily* human, as the Word was 'made flesh'.

The use of 'ἐν ἀρχῇ' as reference to Genesis is interesting in the sense that it prompts contemplation of other possible references in the Prologue.

There seems to be a connection between the concept of 'Logos' and the concept of Sophia, or wisdom. Wisdom, which is said to have existed before the world was made, is personified in Proverbs, being shown to have acted alongside God in creation (Proverbs 8 22-31). The Logos in John 1 parallels this Wisdom in Proverbs. Wisdom is referred to in the New Testament in relation to Christ on multiple occasions, e.g. Luke 2:40, « And the child [Jesus] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.»

According to Gerald O'Collins in *Christology, A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* Jesus has been named 'Wisdom' by Church Fathers and the portrayal of the Word in John's prologue shows a "marked resemblance" to what is said about Wisdom in the Old Testament. This could make one question why John used the word Logos rather than Wisdom in his Prologue- the idea of 'Sophia' seems to have been personified, which can be seen in Russian Orthodox tradition where Sophia is a crowned woman with wings. Sophia is referred to as 'she', as is Wisdom in Proverbs. Perhaps John could have caused confusion if he used the term Sophia due to the fact that Jesus was incarnated in the body of a male. The term 'Logos', which has been used in non-Christian schools of thought, would have been familiar to those outside of Christianity's sphere of influence, therefore being effective in communicating John's main message. This then leads one to think about the purpose the Gospel of John was intended to serve. The evangelistic purpose of the Gospel is made explicit in John 20:30, where it says "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". John portrays Jesus as the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and man, substance of His Mother and born in this world, and writes about Jesus' nature without making a singular hypostasis *primary*. There seems to be a greater focus on Jesus' divinity in John than in the Synoptic Gospels, but it can be argued that this is due to the form of John's Gospel. The Synoptic Gospels are more biographical, whereas John seems to be defending the concept that Jesus is divine against those who reject this notion, perhaps writing in the form of an apologetic, and therefore having a *focus* on the deity of Jesus.

John explores the different natures of Jesus in the Gospel with the actions and words of Jesus he chose to include. Jesus claims in John 10:30 “My Father and myself are one”, and also uses “I am” statements to highlight His divinity. The “I am” statements appear 7 times preceding predicate nominative nouns, like “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12) for instance, which reflects on terminology introduced in the Prologue. It is also used without a predicate, in the form of “Εγώ εἰμι”, which seems to parallel “אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה”, or the ambiguous “I am that I am” phrase in Exodus 3:14. Here Jesus’ divine nature is reiterated, however this does not mean that his human nature is disregarded, or that either nature is primary. Käsemann argued that the “I am” statements could be interpreted in a way that downplayed or overshadowed Jesus’ humanity. Despite this, John contains instances that explicitly reveal human nature in Jesus. Jesus “weeps” in John 11 in the shortest verse in the Gospel. Jesus is also shown to be tired and thirsty at the well. Weeping, or showing any sort of emotion, bodily processes and so on conveys Jesus’ humanity; the actions of Jesus that John writes about in the Gospel don’t reveal either nature to be primary, and reveal both humanity and divinity.

Some could argue that there is a subordination in relation to Jesus and God presented in the Gospel of John which could lead to questions regarding any sort of nature, or more specifically primary nature. For example, “I can not do anything without my Father” implies some sort of hierarchy within the relationship between Jesus and God. One might question how this may impact Christ’s humanity and/or divinity. However, one can make the distinction between a functional subordination and an ontological subordination; Jesus is portrayed as functionally subordinate to the Father rather than ontologically subordinate, given that they both refer to God (“the Word was God”). The functional subordination could refer to the idea of Jesus the Son in relation to God the Father- they are of the same essence, and John sees the relationship between the Son and the Father in functional terms. Or, one could argue that what seems to be an element of subordination regarding the Son is just a way of showing how aligned the wills and activities of Jesus and the Father are.

Going back to the Prologue, there are some who would even argue that John doesn’t actually claim that Jesus is God. The New World Translation of John 1:1 states that ‘the Word was with God, and the Word was *a god*’. According to Ian Paul, because Greek lacks an indefinite article, θεὸς being anarthrous (lacking an article) does not correspond to the English indefinite article and the New World Translation misunderstands the significance of omitting the article. For example, one can see that ‘In the beginning’, or ‘ἐν ἀρχῇ’, also lacks an article, yet English refers to it as ‘the’ beginning rather than ‘a’ beginning. The subject-verb-object order is very rigid in English, and looking at translations into different languages with case systems that enable the structure to be more flexible, one can see translations that convey a message in a vein similar to that of the KJV, like Luther’s German translation which says ‘Gott war das Wort’. Slavic-language translations, like the Elizabeth Bible or New Serbian Translation write « и Бог бе Слово » and « и Бог беше Реч. », where ‘Бог’

(God) is the predicate in the nominative form, and the word for 'Word' is the subject, also in the nominative form; these languages have no articles at all, avoiding the issue brought up by the New World Translation, which can perhaps be considered Anglo-centric, or even just misunderstood, as Ian Paul writes. Therefore, one can justifiably argue that the 'Word was God' reveals that John is writing that Jesus is fully divine, i.e. God.

In the Gospel of John, the signs or miracles performed by Jesus play a significant role in revealing the Gospel's Christology, serving to reveal divinity. While it is evident how performing miracles would reflect on Jesus' deity, one can also argue that the miracles simultaneously reveal humanity. For example, Jesus shows the human emotions of empathy and compassion when the blind man is healed, showing concern for his suffering and engaging in dialogue with him, reiterating his compassionate response to human suffering. Even the physicality (or 'flesh') of Jesus is highlighted in the miracles; Jesus engages in physical actions that reflect his humanity. For example, in the sign of turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), he participates in a wedding celebration, a very human social event. His physical presence at these events underscores his humanity, and spatial language is used in reference to Christ, as the "Word" became "flesh" and "dwelt among" man.

Kierkegaard writes that the dual nature of Christ is the "ultimate paradox" in *Philosophical pieces*, claiming that the paradox can only be resolved when one takes a leap of faith away from one's understanding and reasoning towards belief in God. The nature of the hypostatic union is meant to defy human comprehension- when thinking about the Gospel of John and its evangelistic purpose, perhaps one could argue that the Gospel itself does not need to have an equal focus for divinity and humanity (in terms of content, i.e. how much and what was included. There is a clear *focus* on divinity, but not a dismissal of humanity) as its purpose is that the reader may 'believe', as written earlier. Perhaps here faith takes precedence over reason, and perhaps no amount of physical 'evidence' (i.e. the content in the Gospel of John. Evidence as a word could be quite contentious here, perhaps written instances is better) could sway the reader's opinions. Since the author of John desperately wants the reader to believe, and a belief in Jesus will generally entail a belief in a hypostatic union, then John's focus on Jesus' divinity may not detract from Jesus' humanity, but rather lead the reader to *believe* in it via a leap of faith no matter how explicit John is in his references to Jesus' humanity, therefore having the dual natures work hand-in-hand.

Overall, one can justifiably argue that there is no *primary* nature of Jesus in the Gospel of John, but rather Jesus is portrayed to be fully divine and fully human. While there certainly may be an emphasis on Jesus' deity, there are relevant contextual factors that one must consider, and the apologetical stances when compared to the more biographical structures of the Synoptic Gospel can suggest that the author of John intended to evangelise and make the readers believe that Jesus is God. John openly writes that he cannot address every event or aspect regarding Jesus (John 20:30), and it can be argued that the focus on Christ's divinity doesn't overshadow Christ's humanity, but rather harmonises with it.

## Bibliography:

<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/does-john-1-1-mean-the-word-was-a-god/#:~:text=The%20NWT%20translates%20the%20end,as%20does%20orthodox%20Christian%20belief.>

[https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Christology.html?id=3XHxFmxq8KoC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Christology.html?id=3XHxFmxq8KoC&redir_esc=y)

UNDERSTANDING THE FOURTH GOSPEL Second Edition John Ashton

Foreword to The Testament of Jesus, A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17

The Gospel According to John Andrew T. Lincoln

The Gospel According to John Larry Kreitzer

Filozofske Mrvice - Milan Tabakovic , Kierkegaard

ERNST KÄSEMANN JESU LETZTER WILLE NACH JOHANNES 17