THE USE OF THE WORD ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ IN THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

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In the Nestle-Aland text of the Johannine Epistles the word χριστός occurs 11 times. Although for obvious reasons the manuscripts differ in a number of these instances, all modern editors are in agreement with Nestle at this point. Only Westcott and Hort add a twelfth instance between square brackets, reading δε ἐκαν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς[Χριστός] ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ with B in I John iv 15.

In four cases we find Ἰησοῦς Χριστός directly linked with ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ. In each instance this combination is so placed within the sentence as to put all emphasis on the christological statement. In I John i 3b a long and involved argument ends with the joyful asseveration καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. With this statement at the beginning of I John may be connected a similar one at the end of this letter καὶ ἐσμὲν ἐν τῷ ἁληθείᾳ, ἐν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ (v 20). In both cases the unity between God and Jesus Christ, Father and Son, which receives so much attention in the Gospel and in the Epistles of John is presupposed and stressed. The same applies to the formula ἦνα πιστεύσωμεν τῷ ὄνοματι τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ


2 G. D. Kilpatrick, in the B.F.B.S. Greek-English Diglot, omits the second ἐν τῷ as a possible dittography and reads τὸν ἁληθοῦν θεόν in the immediately preceding clause. For further details and argumentation see G. D. Kilpatrick, “Some Notes on Johannine Usage” in The Bible Translator XI, 1960, pp. 173-177 and “Two Johannine Idioms in the Johannine Epistles”, J. Th. S. NS. XII, 1961, pp. 272-273. Kilpatrick tries to show that in the Gospel and Epistles of John ἁληθόν is always used predicatively, and ἁληθοῦς attributively. In all instances where an exception to this rule may be found the text is uncertain.
Xristoû in I John iii 23 and to the introductory greeting in II John 3 ἔσται μεθ' ἡμῶν χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη παρὰ θεοῦ πατρός, καὶ παρὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρός, ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἀγάπῃ. ¹

In I John ii 1 Jesus Christ is said to act as παράκλητος, one who pleads our cause with the Father. Jesus Christ is not called the Son here, but again his intimate relationship with God is emphasized. In this text he receives the epithet δικαιος, a “messianic” designation in Acts iii 14, vii 52, xxii 14 as in Eth. Enoch xxxviii 2 and liii 6. It is, however, far from certain that a messianic meaning or overtone is intended here. In i 9 God himself is called πιστὸς καὶ δικαιος in connection with his forgiveness for those who confess their sins. In ii 29 and iii 7 the righteousness of Jesus is mentioned as an example for his followers who as true children of God should be like the One who is Son of God par excellence (see iii 7-10). Jesus Christ, who is righteous, lives in communion with God and is therefore able to intercede for the sins of those who believe in Him.

Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαιού ἐνεργομένη (Jas v 16, cf 17-18 and Prov. xv 29)!

Another emphatic statement is οὗτος ἔστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὅδετος καὶ ἀληθος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (I John v 6) which follows on a passage which begins with the formula πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὁτι Ἰησοῦς ἔστιν ὁ χριστός in v 1 and ends with a similar statement ὁ πιστεύων οτι Ἰησοῦς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ in v 5. Does this imply that the designation χριστός and the expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ are not only narrowly linked, but also interchangeable? The answer to this question should, I think, be in the affirmative. The whole argument in v 1-5 revolves round the question who are truly born from God, and the answer is clearly: those who believe in the Son of God and love the children of God. It would have fitted the author’s argumentation if he had begun with the expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ or with ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ as in v 18 ². Nevertheless the belief in Jesus as the Son of God is mentioned only at the end, and the section opens with a reference to the belief in Jesus as ὁ χριστός.

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¹ Here a number of textual witnesses add κυρίου before Ἰησοῦ; see e.g. the apparatus in the Greek New Testament.
² In this verse this expression is used besides πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. This latter phrase denotes the believers; the former most likely refers to Jesus Christ, cf John vi 39, x 28 f., xvii 12 (,15); Rev. iii 10. For a discussion of the problems connected with this verse see the present author’s De Brieven van Johannes, Nijkerk 1968, ad loc.