Christology is without any doubt the main theme of the Fourth Gospel (20:30–31); it is developed in many debates of Jesus with his opponents and in discussions with his disciples. It stresses, repeatedly and in a variety of ways, the uniqueness of the relationship between Jesus as the Son and God as the Father—a theme also highlighted in the Prologue in 1:1–18. There is a particular “Johannine” Christology, characteristic of a specific community (or group of communities) which, to a considerable extent, derives its identity from that Christology. The Johannine Epistles show how this Christology remained the central issue in the life of the community(-ies) and how it became necessary to rethink and redefine it in order to safeguard it against misinterpretation.¹

In the story told by the Gospel of John “the Jews” play an important part as opponents of Jesus. There are also Jews who sympathize with Jesus (so, for instance, Nicodemus in chapter 3) but who somehow miss the mark. Some Jewish followers of Jesus have an inadequate faith (as in 8:30). A select group of disciples, however, are repeatedly and intensively instructed by him (especially in chapters 13–18). They receive the promise that, after Jesus’ return to the Father, they will be guided by the Spirit of Truth. This will remind them of all Jesus has said and lead them to a full understanding of who Jesus is (so, for instance, 14:26; 16:12–15). The Johannine community sees itself in continuity with this group of intimate friends of Jesus, insiders instructed in the true understanding of Jesus’ identity,

¹ I cannot deal in detail with the problem of the relationship between the Epistles and the Gospel. There certainly is a difference in emphasis, also in Christology. Nevertheless the conflict reflected in 1 and 2 John has left traces in the Gospel in its present form (see n. 17). See my “Variety and Development in Johannine Christology”, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (SBLSBS 11: Missoula MT: Scholars, 1977).
led by the Spirit, and sent out into a hostile world (15:18–16:4; 20:21–22).

**Historical Explanations of the Unity and Variety in Johannine Christology**

In recent scholarship different answers have been given to the question whether, and to what extent, the controversies and debates in which Jesus plays a central part reflect controversies and debates taking place between the Johannine community and others in and (particularly) outside the larger group of followers of Jesus. The answers are often related to the problem of the origin of the Fourth Gospel: can we detect various stages in its composition and do these stages in turn reflect decisive events in the history of the community for which it was written? Is it, then, possible to trace different stages in the development of Johannine Christology and to show how the Johannine Christians responded to questions asked and objections raised by in- and outsiders in various circumstances? By way of introduction it may be helpful to mention a number of different approaches to these questions.

**M.C. de Boer**

A survey of different views on the relation between communal history, composition history and the variety in Johannine Christology is found in Martinus C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus.* His own reconstruction of Johannine communal history in his second chapter (pp. 43–82) is most indebted to those of J.L. Martyn and R.E. Brown, two scholars whose views have been very influential in recent scholarship on the Fourth Gospel.

De Boer distinguishes four phases in Johannine history: (1) mission to the Jews (“low” Christology); (2) expulsion from the synagogue (after which a “high” Christology developed); (3) martyrdom for “high” Christology; Gentile converts; contact with other groups; (4) schism (Johannine Epistles) followed by the dissolution of Johannine Christianity. In accordance with this, he distinguishes four perspec-

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2 CBET 17; Kampen: Kok-Pharos, 1996.