

case the writer of 1 John is stating the truth about Jesus positively, in order to recall his audience in general to the essence of the gospel: Jesus, one with man, is also Christ and Son of God (one with God). The witness to that truth forms the subject of the vv which follow.

6. In the previous v John has described the content of orthodox Christian belief as faith in Jesus as Son of God. Now he proceeds to adduce the witnesses to the truth of that confession, and begins by revealing their *character* (vv 6–9). This v needs to be taken with v 8, since in both contexts there is a cryptic allusion, to “water and blood,” which presumably needs to be interpreted in the same way (but see the comments below).

Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι’ ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός . . . ἐν τῷ αἵματι, “he is the one who came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ . . . (and) in blood.” The demonstrative οὗτός (“he,” or “this”) links this v firmly to the second part of v 5, and directs our attention to the end of the present sentence. It was *this* Jesus who came, and he is Jesus the “Christ.” Cf. a similar construction (with reference to “antichrist”) at 2:22 and 2 John 7.

What does John mean by saying that Jesus Christ “came by water and blood; not in water only, but in water and in blood”? The original reference was no doubt easily accessible to John’s readers, but it is less obvious to us. There are three major approaches to the explanation of this passage.

(a) The “water and blood” have been taken to refer to the two sacraments of baptism (water) and the eucharist (blood). So Cullmann, *Christian Worship*, 110 n.1; cf. Westcott, 182. Sometimes this reference is confined to the second mention of “water and blood,” later in the v (so Malatesta, *Interiority*, 312); although Haas (*Handbook*, 119) correctly points out that the nouns in both parts of the v must be taken in the same sense. However, such a sacramental interpretation, which runs back to Luther and Calvin, involves difficulties. (i) John is concerned here with the historical presence and incarnate life of Jesus on earth, not with his continuing manifestation in the sacramental life of the Church. (ii) This fact is underlined by John’s use of the aorist ὁ ἐλθὼν (literally, “the one who came”), which suggests a definite moment in history (the Incarnation), rather than a repeated appearance in the sacraments (cf. 4:2). (iii) The use of the term αἷμα (“blood”) as a synonym for the eucharist is strange, and without parallel. (iv) There is no suggestion that the sacramental presence of Jesus in the experience of believers was a problem to members of the Johannine community. (v) The second statement in this v (“not in water only . . .”) makes it clear that a meaning must be found for these terms which allows them to be distinguished; whereas the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper manifestly complement each other.

It is “just possible” that a secondary allusion to the sacraments is present in this v (Marshall, 233 n.8), if a similar reference is to be discovered at v 8. But, in any case, it is unlikely.

(b) A second line of exegesis, which goes back to Augustine, associates the reference to “water and blood” in this v with John 19:34–35 (the spear-thrust at the crucifixion of Jesus, which resulted in a “flow of blood and water” from his side and the subsequent “testimony” of the beloved disciple). So Williams, 55–57. A further problem then is the correct interpretation of the passage in John 19. The fourth evangelist’s approach to the passion of

Jesus is neither symbolic (the blood and water stand for the "cleansing and life-giving" work of Christ; Brooke 133) nor sacramental (the spear-thrust connects the Lord's death with baptism and the eucharist; Cullmann, *Christian Worship*, 114-16; cf. also Westcott, 181-82; Williams, 56-57). The incident of the spear-thrust in John's Gospel primarily expresses the historical truth that Jesus really died (cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* [2nd ed. London: SPCK, 1978], 556; Smalley, *John*, 129-30, 224-25). On that showing it may perhaps be linked to this passage in 1 John, since the subject here is also the reality (and truth) of the incarnation.

But even then serious problems arise. (i) The order of the words differs. "Blood and water" in John 19:34 become "water and blood" here. (ii) The meaning of the verb $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\theta\acute{\omega}\nu$ ("who came") has to be forced if it is to refer to the incident of the spear-thrust. "Blood and water" on that occasion came from Jesus; but in this v John is saying that Jesus came "by or in water and blood." (iii) The "testimony" in John 19 is given by the observer, whereas in the present v the witness to Jesus is provided by the water and blood (and Spirit). (iv) Connecting v 6 with John 19:34-35 does not really account for the qualification in the later part of the sentence ("not in water only, but in water and in blood"); indeed, it makes nonsense of it.

(c) A more natural explanation of John's thought at this point is possible. The majority of commentators rightly see that the chief reference of the "water and blood" in v 6 is neither to the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist nor to the blood and water which flowed from the side of Jesus according to John 19:34. Rather, John is speaking here of the terminal points in the earthly ministry of Jesus: his baptism at the beginning, and his crucifixion at the end (such an interpretation was followed by Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 16; although his reference to it also reveals the early connection which was made between this passage and the incident of the spear-thrust). Historically Jesus "came" into his power and authority by the "water" of his baptism, at which point he was declared to be God's Son (Mark 1:11; John 1:34); and he "came" into his power and authority in an even more ultimate sense by the "blood" of his cross, a moment which the fourth evangelist describes as the "glorification" of Christ (John 17:1). Cf. 4:2.

Those who interpret v 6 in this way frequently claim that John's emphasis on these two important events in the life of Jesus, his baptism and death, must be governed by the need to resist gnostic (and specifically Cerinthian) tendencies on the part of some members in the Johannine church. Marshall's comment (232-33) is typical of this viewpoint. By insisting that Jesus Christ was truly baptized and truly died on the cross, Marshall argues, the writer was not simply refuting a docetic approach to the person of Jesus, in which the reality of his Incarnation was played down. Rather, John was attacking those heretics (like Cerinthus) who believed that the heavenly Christ descended upon Jesus at his baptism, but withdrew from him before his death (for John's opposition to Cerinthus see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.4). For this reason, it is suggested, the writer stresses later in the v the fact that Jesus Christ is the one who came "not in water only, but in water and in blood." Against the heterodox opinion that a merely human Jesus experienced baptism and crucifixion, John insists that he was already Messiah (Jesus the "Christ") on both occasions.

This explanation is appealing; but it does not solve all the problems, or take full account of John's situation. For example, it is hard to imagine that a Cerinthian view of the baptism of Jesus could have been effectively refuted by saying that he came "by water," because such a statement might easily be misinterpreted to mean that Jesus was "adopted" as the Christ (since he also received the Spirit, John 1:32) precisely at that moment (cf. Brown, *Community*, 113). Moreover, it is unlikely that heretical views of a Cerinthian nature would have developed in a community gathered around the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel, which lends no support at all to the notion that Jesus and the Christ ("the Word") functioned as separate entities during the ministry (so Brown, *ibid.*). Had such ideas arisen, they could have been swiftly countered by appealing to the teaching of the Gospel itself.

Brown (109-123) argues instead that an unbalanced reading of John's Gospel had led the heretically inclined members of the Johannine circle to believe that the human existence of Jesus, while real, was neither limited nor salvifically significant. Thus, the writer of 1 John accompanies statements implying the preexistence of Jesus with others which stress the earthly career of the incarnate Word; and Christ is presented not only as revealer, but also as redeemer. So here Jesus is found to be truly human (baptized in water and crucified in shed blood); but this "human modality" belongs to the one who, as also truly divine, both reveals and conveys eternal life (1:1-2; 5:20).

This reading of the text is illuminating and takes seriously the heresy-ridden nature of John's community. The only possible objection is that in support of the humanity of Christ John refers to the span of Jesus' ministry, his *baptism* and death, rather than to the full span of his life, his *birth* and death. But the Gospel of John, like the Gospel of Mark indeed, covers precisely this span; the fourth evangelist had no need to include an infancy narrative in his work to make the point that Jesus was one with *man* as well as with God. Cf. Houlden, 127. This reading also strengthens the suggestion made in this commentary that John was attacking *two* heresies in his church, not one: the Greek view that Jesus was not fully man (hence the emphatic claim that he was truly baptized and crucified); and the Jewish assertion that the Christ was not fully God (hence the insistence that these experiences were undergone by "Jesus Christ," Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, using the full title, the divine bringer of life everlasting; cf. 5:20). For the idea that John is here defending the confession of Jesus as Messiah against Jews (alone) see O'Neill, *Puzzle*, 60; against Bultmann, 80 n.3.

The true identity of Jesus, the writer appears to be saying, is only to be discovered by looking at the whole of his life, including its end. He came by water and, triumphantly, in blood; at this point the essential divinity of the human Jesus is most fully revealed and most fully victorious. Such a disclosure also applies to the *work* of Christ. He came not only with baptismal water, the timeless symbol of cleansing, but also in the actual, historical means for achieving this, the blood which "purifies us from every sin" (1:7; cf. 4:10).

The two references in the Gr. of v 6 to "water and blood" differ slightly. On the first occasion John uses the preposition *διὰ* ("by") and includes no articles with the nouns. Later in the v the preposition becomes *ἐν* ("in"), and the articles are included (*ἐν τῷ ὕδατι*, twice, "in the water"; *καὶ ἐν τῷ αἵματι*, "and in the blood"). Various attempts have been made to find a subtle

difference of meaning in the switch from *διά* to *ἐν* (cf. Marshall, 232 n.6); but probably nothing more is involved than a literary variation (so Marshall, *ibid.*). Both prepositions express the manner of Jesus' advent. The "locative" sense which is given to *διά* by Haas, *Handbook*, 118, following Law, *Tests*, 96 n.2, applies less easily to the cross than to the baptism of Jesus. He perhaps "passed *through*" the waters of the Jordan; but he scarcely went "through" the blood of Calvary.

The absence and presence of articles with the nouns *ὕδωρ* ("water") and *αἷμα* ("blood") may, however, be deliberate. John is perhaps indicating that whereas "water and blood" were the general instruments of the humanity of Jesus, "the" water of baptism and "the" blood of the cross were specific instances of these elements (so Houlden, 127).

καὶ τὸ πνευμά ἐστιν τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ πνευμά ἐστὶν ἡ ἀλήθεια, "and the Spirit is the one who bear witness, for the Spirit is truth." John has claimed that at the heart of orthodox Christian belief is the confession (which needs to be maintained) that Jesus is not only Son of God and Messiah, but also one whose advent was entirely historical. In support of the truth of this assertion the writer refers to the "witness" of the Spirit, which may be trusted because the Spirit is (and thus speaks) the truth. Cf. 2:20, 27, the *χρίσμα* ("anointing") imparts the truth; 4:2, a true acknowledgment of Jesus ultimately derives from the Spirit (Bultmann, 80). On *πνεῦμα* ("spirit") see also 3:24; 4:13.

Several ideas are present in this v. First, John is saying that the Spirit testifies now (*τὸ μαρτυροῦν*, "the one who bears witness," is in the present tense) to the reality of Jesus as one with God (his Son and his Messiah) and one with man (baptized and crucified in history). The witness concerned is both corporate and individual. The Spirit bears testimony to the salvific character of Jesus in and through the Church by means of preaching, inspired prophecy and the sacraments (cf. Dodd, 129; Schnackenburg, 259-60). But the Spirit also witnesses to the truth about Jesus in the hearts of believers, who then possess that witness within themselves, as John implies in v 10 (cf. Stott, 180; Bultmann, 80). In other words, the spiritual criteria for validating christological truth are both objective and subjective, outward and inward (cf. Maurice, 274-76). In both cases we are reminded of the farewell discourse of John's Gospel, where the special ministry of the truthful Spirit-Paraclete is described as testifying to Jesus (15:26; 16:13-14; cf. 14:26; 16:7-11).

One further notion may be uncovered in this passage. The Spirit's witness, of which John is speaking here, need not be confined to the ongoing period of the Church (the Spirit testifies to believers in the *present*). Possibly a reference to the Spirit's activity during and even before the life and ministry of Jesus is included. For the Spirit who bears witness to us now is the same Spirit who descended on Jesus at his baptism, as a mark of his divine Sonship (John 1:32-34), and also inspired the OT prophets who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah (1 Pet 1:10-12; 2 Pet 1:19-21; cf. John 5:39). So Marshall, 235.

The conjunction *ὅτι* ("for") in this clause may imply that the Spirit gives his testimony to Jesus because he is either *filled* or *constrained* to do so. However, as Westcott (184) points out, both meanings are no doubt present. In that which is divine, "nature and office coincide" (*ibid.*).