

THE CONFESSION OF PETER ACCORDING TO JOHN 6:69

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Summary

The title found in John 6:69, as the confession of Peter, is 'the Holy One of God'. The same title is found in Mark and Luke on the lips of a demon possessed man. Scholarship has been divided on the precise meaning of the title, with the most common solution being that it means Messiah. This article refutes that view and suggests instead that the primary meaning of the title is that of representation or agency. For Mark and Luke it is an agency of judgment on the demons while for John, Jesus is also the life-giver.

I. Introduction

The sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John, is filled with dramatic content. The reader is taken from the feeding of the five thousand to an abortive attempt to make Jesus a King (v. 15), then through a lengthy discourse on Jesus as the Bread from Heaven to Jesus' emphatic pronouncement that believers should eat and drink of the Son of Man (v. 53-6). Dissension breaks out among the disciples (v. 66), and indeed many turn their backs on Jesus. Jesus then inquires of the Twelve, 'You do not also wish to go away, do you?' (v. 67 NIV). Peter responds on behalf of the others, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have (the) words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God' (v. 68-9). In response Jesus refers to his choosing of the Twelve, and the tragedy that one of them is a devil! (v. 70). The Evangelist concludes the chapter by relating this accusation not to Peter (*cf.* Mk. 8:33), but to Judas.

The title 'the Holy One of God' (ο J a{gio" tou' qeou') here in John 6:69 is well attested by the manuscript evidence and is today the generally accepted reading, while the variants are clearly scribal attempts to bring John into line with the Synoptic confessions of Peter, and in particular Matthew 16:16, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God'. Apparently John's use of "the Holy One of God" caused as many difficulties for the early scribes as it does for contemporary scholarship.

II. The Enigma of the Holy One

Scholarly opinion on the meaning of the Holy One of God is deeply divided. Perhaps the most common interpretation is that in line with the scribal tradition, namely that the title is messianic, signifying Jesus' connection with the Davidic tradition, and so in substance no different from Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20 and Matthew 16:16.¹ Friedrich² while concurring that the title is messianic, interprets it as a priestly title in line with the priestly messiah in evidence at Qumran. We remember too that Aaron was described in Ps. 106:16 (LXX) as τὸν ἁγίον κούριον rendering the Hebrew *hwh' qwrQ*. Certainly in Israelite thinking, the priesthood was seen to be holy (*cf.* Nu. 16:3-5 and Sir 45:6), but there were others who with good cause might deserve the same epithet. Hahn³ refers back to the Old Testament tradition of describing prophets as holy men, for his view that the title links Jesus with the prophetic tradition (*cf.* Mk. 8:28) and so John, then, represents an earlier tradition than the messianic view of the Synoptics. The difficulty in each of these views is that no evidence exists as yet to confirm that the description 'holy' was the peculiar domain of any of these three offices. Certainly there are no grounds for assuming that the title 'Holy One of God' was understood as a technical term for either priest, prophet or king. From the perspective

¹This article represents an updated form of the conclusion of my PhD *The Holy One of God: A Study of John 6:69* (Durham University 1983) supervised by Professor C.K. Barrett. For the messianic interpretation see B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London, Oliphants 1972) 275f. and J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin (ed.), *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (London, Black 1968) 199f. for John 6:69; D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Middlesex, Pelican 1963) 79 for Mark; E.E. Ellis *The Gospel of Luke* (London, Oliphants) 99-100 for Luke. Elsewhere in the NT Jesus is called 'the Holy One'—Acts 3:14 (*cf.* 4:27, 30; Lk. 1:35; 1 Jn 2:20; Rev. 3:7). He is also referred to by the title οἰσιος or the Pious One, should be treated as a separate title and not used to interpret οἰγιος, *pace* D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark* (Middlesex, Pelican 1963) 79 and A.W.F. Blunt, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (Oxford, Clarendon 1929) 148.

²G. Friedrich 'Beobachtungen zur messianischen Höhepriestenerwartung in den Synoptikern', *ZThK* 53 (1956) 265-311, also K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Munich, Koesel 1970) 53.

³F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London, Lutterworth 1969) 223-8, 231-9. See 2 Ki. 4:9 where Elisha is called ἄνθρωπος τοῦ θεοῦ ἁγίος. Note also CD 6:1 and Sir 45:2-6.

of the Fourth Gospel and its deliberate use of titles, it seems unlikely that this title was simply an alternative to a more familiar description. Rather the solution to the enigma of the Holy One must be sought within the appreciation of its uniqueness.

The title occurs only three times in the New Testament. Here in John 6:69 and twice in the Synoptics (Mk. 1:24 and Lk. 4:34), where it is found on the lips of a demon possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum. The question of the man, ‘What do we have to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?’ is followed by the announcement, ‘I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ In view of the tension evident in this stylised form of challenge, explanations of the Holy One of God, in Mark and Luke, have stressed the difference between Jesus and the demons. Thus Cranfield speaks of the title in Mark as referring to the divinity of Jesus, and so in line with the Son of God secret of that Gospel.⁴ The demons therefore testify unwillingly to the divinity of Jesus, which is hidden from human eyes until the moment of the crucifixion. While the logic of such a solution is clear, caution is still needed. The adjective ‘holy’ does not in itself imply divinity, but rather something closer to the view of Lightfoot, who declares that it sets Jesus apart from all that is profane.⁵ Jesus as the Holy One is therefore closely associated with God,⁶ and so stands in opposition to the demonic hordes. Procksch speaks of ‘a moral antithesis’ which emerges between the Holy Spirit resident in Jesus and the evil spirits.⁷ Jesus is thus seen to be the Holy One by virtue of his role as the bearer of the Holy Spirit. Clearly as the variety of interpretations indicate the question of the Holy One in the Gospels is far from reaching a solution.

Bultmann drew a line between John’s use of the title and the Synoptic use, which he perceived to be messianic.⁸ For John, Bultmann argued, the title carried a sense of Jesus as the one coming

⁴C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (London, CUP 1977) 77; also A.E. Harvey, *Jesus on trial. A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London, SPCK 1976) 37-45.

⁵R.H. Lightfoot, *St John’s Gospel. A Commentary* (Oxford, OUP 1956) 164.

⁶So J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday 1983) 546.

⁷O. Procksch, ‘ἅγιος κτλ’ *TDNT* 1, 88-115 esp. 101f.

⁸R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John. A commentary* (Oxford, Blackwell 1971) 449 n. 4. Thus Bultmann does not reject the messianic interpretation of the title out of hand as argued by some scholars.

in judgment upon the world, the other-worldly redeemer and judge.⁹ Barrett writes that ‘At this point John is moving away from the technical language of Judaism into more universal categories’.¹⁰ Although no precise category is mentioned by Barrett, one might suggest that John is here deliberately stretching the limits of Judaism to inculcate something of his Christian tradition and Higher Christology.¹¹ Schnackenburg likewise speaks of John’s use here of ‘a deeper Christian sense’ similar to Matthew’s inclusion of the phrase ‘Son of the living God’.¹² Common to each of these views is the conviction that the interpretation of John 6:69 is dependent on the immediate context, rather than insights gained from the Synoptics. The truth of this is evident, but to close the door entirely on the two other clear uses of the title, seems to my mind to be premature. Rather one should treat the title in John 6:69 as consisting of layers, one of which is the Johannine layer, but buried beneath this may well lie older traditions and it is our task to uncover these, not least in the Old Testament.

II. The office of the Holy One

Apart from Aaron and Elijah, the Old Testament also describes the angels as holy ones and God as the Holy One of Israel. What is the common link between these different uses of holy ones? As long as one deals with only the negative understanding of the Hebrew *qadoš* as someone or something separated from the profane, one misses the vital ingredient. Where Snaith¹³ emphasised the negative sense of separation, Eichrodt¹⁴ drew attention to the positive aspect of *qadoš*. The adjective stresses relation with the sphere of holiness, a sense of belonging to God and being possessed by him. Moreover it carries overtones of agency, with the idea of belonging to God in order to serve as his representative. So a prophet or priest or angel may be

⁹Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 450.

¹⁰C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, Westminster 1978) 307, in line with Jn. 4:42.

¹¹The term ‘Higher Christology’ is used by R.E. Brown, *The community of the Beloved Disciple* (Philadelphia, Paulist Press 1979) 43-7.

¹²R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John. Commentary on Chapters 5-12* (New York, Seabury 1980) 76.

¹³Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, Epworth 1944) 21-32. Although in his later work, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, Oliphants 1967) 78 he prefers the positive aspect of ‘belonging to God’.

¹⁴Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament 1* (Philadelphia, Westminster 1961) 137. See also H.S. Gehman, ‘ΑΥΙΟΣ in the Septuagint and its relation to the Hebrew original’ *VT* 4 (1954) 337-48.

described as a holy one¹⁵ implying their service of God and their representation of the sphere of the holy—the domain of God.

The context of the Divine Council may well serve to illustrate this feature of holiness, with its angelic members who are both representatives of the nations of the world, and the messengers of the court. Even the prophets, like Jeremiah, visualise themselves as standing in the Divine Council so as to convey the pronouncements of the court to their own people and time.¹⁶ In the context of God's Council, the holy one may be seen to be an office in its own right. *Representation* and *association* are the vital ingredients. Indeed when Isaiah uses the title *Holy One of Israel*, what he has in mind is God's function as the representative of Israel and as the member of the Divine Council who in a special way represents Israel.¹⁷ Later this role would be taken over by Michael, as we see in Daniel and in the Qumran texts.¹⁸

The Holy One is therefore a term for the *Agent* of God, one of his special emissaries, whose attribute of holiness confirms the close relation between him and his principal. Secondly, the holy one is seen to fulfil a *representative* function, standing as a medium between the divine sphere of the holy and the human sphere of the profane. The third ingredient in the Hebrew understanding of holiness, aside and indeed consequent upon those of representation

¹⁵On the agency motif of these offices and their possible relation to the Gospel of John, see J-A. Buehner, *Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr 1977) 341-98.

¹⁶On the Divine Council in the OT, see the work of E.T. Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico California, Scholars Press 1980). On the prophetic role see Je. 23:18 and P.D. Miller, 'The Divine Council and the prophetic call to war' *VT* 28 (1968) 100-7 and M. Black, 'The throne theophany prophetic commission' *Jews, Greeks and Christians*, Festschrift for W.D. Davies (eds.) R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs; (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1976) 57-73.

¹⁷See my article 'The office of the Holy One' *JTHSA* 54 (1986) 35-9.

¹⁸Dn. 12:1 (Michael, the great prince who protects your people) and IQM 17:6-8.

and association, is the sense of *election* or *choice*. We see a similar pattern in the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁹

The LXX in its rendering of holy ones as ἅγιοι, appears to follow the traditional Hebrew thinking. The sense appears to be positive rather than negative, with the same tones of association and representation. Later in the New Testament when Paul wishes to describe the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1:2), he calls them ‘holy ones’, emphasising their association with God and his realm. Moreover he adds that they are chosen (*eklektoi*), implying their function as those who are called to represent God in this world.

III. Jesus the Holy One and the Demons

Our understanding of the Holy One in traditional Hebrew thinking has prepared us for a study of the title as applied to Jesus. However, we proceed with caution, lest we read into the title all the content of the proceeding centuries of Jewish thinking, without justification. In the first place, the title is applied to Jesus, and inevitably it is influenced both by his historical personality and by the early Christian perceptions of Jesus. It is one of several titles applied to Jesus, and as one of the less frequently used titles was soon eclipsed by the dominant traditions of Jesus’ messiahship and his position as Son of God. With this in mind, one could describe the title as messianic or as signifying Jesus’ divinity, or filled with Christian content. But that does not bring us closer to the peculiar content that made this title, rather than one of the more frequent titles, the choice of a demon possessed man in the synagogue of Capernaum.

Mark’s framing of the miracle within the teaching of Jesus (Mk. 1:22, 27), clearly shows his intention to play down the miraculous element of the exorcism.²⁰ Jesus is not just a worker of miracles, but a teacher with authority who brings a new message²¹ to

¹⁹See Fr. Noetscher, ‘Heiligkeit in den Qumranschriften’ *Revue de Qumran* 2 (1959-60) 163-82, 315-44, S. Lamberigts, ‘Le Sens de odwsym dans les Textes de Qumrân’ *ETL* 46 (1970) 24-39 esp. 33. Cf. texts like 1 QM 12:7, 1QSb8f.

²⁰So Kertelge, *op. cit.*, 55-8.

²¹Note Mark 1:27. The punctuation is difficult, but if one reads the καὶ as ‘even’, then one arrives at the reading. ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority. Even (καὶ) the unclean spirits he commands and they obey him’. C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man. A political reading of Mark’s story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis 1988) 141-3 suggests that behind the conflict in Mk. 1 lies the hegemonic struggle between Jesus and the scribal establishment.

the people. Yet what remains with the reader is the memory of that confession. So the Holy One of God becomes a part of Mark's 'open' secret—that is open to the reader, but closed to the disciples—a further aspect of the literary technique of Mark in the interests of his Christology. The title is therefore a pointer towards that moment of revelation when an unnamed Roman soldier declares Jesus to be 'Son of God'.

At a deeper level, the title has its own contribution to make. The title occurs on the lips of a demon possessed man. Indeed it is the demons who are speaking. Bauernfeind suggested that the demons are motivated by a desire to control Jesus by reciting his titles.²² Therefore the perspective differs from the human one, and so the title may be contrasted with the titles which are used by human respondents to Jesus. In Mark, Jesus is hailed by the sick in body as 'Lord' (7:28), 'Son of David' (10:48), 'Master' (9:17), and 'Rabboni' (10:51). By contrast the demons refer to Jesus as 'the Holy One of God' (1:24), 'Son of God' (3:11) and 'Son of the Most High God' (5:7). Moreover the demons have a very real fear. 'Have you come to destroy us?' they ask (1:24) and they beg, 'By God, do not torment me' (5:7).

The demonic perspective is unmistakable. They perceive in Jesus someone who carries the authority of the justice of God. He is the Holy One or Son of God. Like the archangel Michael, who in apocalyptic literature comes to execute the punishment of God upon the forces of evil²³ or the mysterious Melchizedek²⁴ from Qumran, Jesus appears as the champion of God. The titles used by the demons are most appropriate in such a context. Jesus as an Holy one or Son, is like those who represent the Divine Council, and so stands in close

²²O. Bauernfeind, *Die Worte der Dämonen im Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 1927) 18, 55.

²³Cf. 1 Enoch 10:11-15, Assumption of Moses 10:1ff and 1QM 1:25 which connect Michael with the binding of Satan.

²⁴In 11Q Melchizedek, a heavenly being named Melchi-Tzedek judges the forces of evil in the eschatological judgment. See F.L. Horton, *The Melchizedek tradition* (Cambridge, CUP 1976).

association with God—the origin of all holiness. The demons fear him as they do the other agents of God—for he carries with him the authority to punish them. The context of exorcism is akin to holy war as pointed out by Kertelge and Braun²⁵ and the fear of the demons becomes reality. Jesus drives them out.

The force of the article, (ὁ ἅγιος) elevates Jesus above the other agents of God, human or angelic. He is the Holy One *par excellence*. The demons see in Jesus a unique holy one, whose office encapsulates all the force of the authority of God and they feel the deep sense of antagonism which divides the spheres of good and evil. Unwillingly the words are forced from their mouths. They experience real terror in the presence of God's special Holy One—the one destined to judge the world.

IV. The Holy One in John

Understanding the title ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ as consisting of a series of layers, each of which shades the meaning of the title, means that the immediate context assumes important but not final significance. This is particularly true of the title in John 6:69 and indeed of the other titles found in the Fourth Gospel. The Gospel itself demonstrates the slow pilgrimage to faith of the Johannine community, as it moved from the prophetic faith of the Sign's Source to the full blown Christology of the ascending and descending Son of Man.²⁶ Titles like prophet and king are seen to be steps in the path, halting perhaps, but nevertheless in the right direction.²⁷ By contrast, the major titles, like Son of God and Son of Man serve to correct and amplify the other

²⁵Kertelge, *op. cit.*, 55-7 and H. Braun, *Qumran und das Neue Testament. Ein Bericht über 10 Jahre Forschung (1950-9)* 2 Vols (Tübingen, Mohr 1966) 62. Myers, *op. cit.*, 143 refers to Jesus here as 'the envoy of the Kingdom' against the backdrop of an 'apocalyptic combat myth'.

²⁶See J.L. Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History. Essays for interpreters* (New York, Paulist 1979) 90-121 and *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, Abingdon 1979) 102-51.

²⁷So M. de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God. Jesus Christ and the Christians in Johannine perspective* (Missoula, Scholars Press 1970) 49-69 esp. 83 where he writes 'The terms are not wrong but insufficient; they may be used in a wrong context and are, therefore, in need of further definition'.

titles, and so paint a fuller picture of the divine agency of Jesus.

A study of John 6:61-71 shows that Peter's confession is a response, generally to the discourse on the bread of life. There Jesus reveals himself as the 'bread from heaven' who brings eternal life. The wisdom motifs have long been noted within the discourse, not excluding verses 51c-8.²⁸ These are also important for verse 69. Baruch 3:37f contains the tradition of Wisdom's appearance to live among humanity on earth, reminiscent of John's Prologue. 1 Enoch 42:1-3 follows the same tradition, but adds the return of Wisdom to heaven. John appears to utilise both of these traditions. Like Wisdom, Jesus comes to earth and finds no place there for himself but is rejected by his own. This is obvious in the prologue, but equally true of the sixth chapter. The events of John 6 therefore resemble an enacted parable in which there are some who find Wisdom, and others who reject it.

Peter as the spokesman for the Twelve acclaims Jesus as the one with 'the words of life'. The presence of the Wisdom motif in this chapter suggests that Peter is here responding to Jesus as *the incarnate Wisdom*. Indeed in Proverbs 8:35, Wisdom states, 'He who finds me finds life, and he obtains favour from the Lord'. The confession of Peter would thus form a suitable climax to the Johannine presentation of the revelation (words of life) found in Jesus as the bread from heaven and Wisdom of God. In the background as Borgen has indicated is the remembrance of the Exodus, and the events of Sinai.²⁹ Now in Galilee another theophany³⁰ takes place,

²⁸See particularly the work of R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII* (Garden City New York, Doubleday 1966) lxi, cxxii-cxxviii, 30 (on the Prologue) and on Jn. 6, 272-4. C.K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (London, SPCK 1982) 89-90 argues against Brown, *ibid.*, 272 for the persistence of the sapiential theme throughout the discourse including the so-called 'eucharistic' section (51-8). We note verses like Pr. 9:5, Sir 15:3 and esp. Sir 24:19-21, where Wisdom speaks in terms of 'feeding' and 'drinking' of her teaching. J.D.G. Dunn, 'Let John be John. A Gospel for its time', in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr 1983) 330-33 draws together the Wisdom and Logos traditions.

²⁹P.D. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven. An exegetical study of the concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1965) 147-77 esp. 148-58.

³⁰See G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of revelation in Upper Galilee' *JBL* 100 (1981) 575-600.

and the Wisdom of God reveals himself for the world to see.

In having Peter address Jesus not as Messiah or Prophet, but as the Holy One of God, John distances this confession from that of the crowds. Following the miracle of the feeding, the crowd call Jesus 'the prophet' and try to make him king (6:14f). In this instance for Peter to confess Jesus as either prophet or king is for him to emulate the misguided crowd, thereby making a nonsense of the theology of this chapter, and indeed of the Gospel. Already in 1:41f. Simon (Peter) responded to Andrew's recognition of Jesus as Messiah and was renamed Cephas. Therefore, the logic of the Gospel urges us to look beyond a simple messianic or prophetic explanation of Peter's confession. In the immediate context of chapter 6, Peter is seen to be responding to Jesus as the ascending and descending Son of Man (v. 62). The title used in verse 69 therefore should be suitable both as a response to Jesus as the incarnate Wisdom, and at the same time compatible with Jesus' representation of himself as the Son of Man (v. 62 and v. 27). What better title than one rooted in traditions of agency and representation, like the Holy One of God?

The agency aspect of the Holy One is well illustrated in John by the use of the verb *aJgiavzw* usually rendered as 'sanctify', and describing the action of making holy. The verb is used twice of Jesus, in the Gospel, marking his entrance into and departure from the world.³¹ Holiness or the process of becoming holy marks out Jesus as *the* heavenly agent of God. The title used by Peter (v. 69) is therefore most appropriate as a response to Jesus, the Human One who will *ascend* to where he was before (v. 62). To confess Jesus as the Holy One of God, in the context of John 6, is to acknowledge his function as the messenger who comes 'from above'. Bultmann and Haenchen, of all the Johannine scholars, come the closest to this view.³²

³¹Jn. 10:36 and 17:19. The verb is also used twice with reference to the 'making holy' his disciples in 17:17 and 17:19 in conjunction with Jesus sending them into the world (17:18).

³²Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 450 and E. Haenchen, *John 1* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1984) 307 who describes the Holy One as the 'one who has come from God as redeemer, who himself belongs to the divine sphere, and who therefore can make the claim to be a bearer of an authoritative message from God'.

The double verbs ‘believed’ and ‘have come to know’ in verse 69, affirm this confession as an accurate one.³³ Unlike the confession of the crowds or that of Nathaniel, who is promised ‘greater things’. Peter’s confession measures up to the status of true belief. It ranks therefore with the confessions of Martha and Thomas, and the stated aim of the Gospel. Thus we may stress the adequate capacity of the title ‘the Holy One of God’ as a vehicle for reflecting the true nature of the Johannine Jesus.

Peter’s confession forms an ascending trio of claims. Jesus is Lord. He has the words of eternal life. Finally as the true object of belief and knowledge, he is the Holy One of God. The first two clauses find their meaning in the third. In what way is Jesus Lord? By what authority does he utter words of life? The answer is defined in terms of the person of Jesus (he is the Holy One), but more significantly in terms of his relationship with God (he is ‘of God’). As usual John marks out clearly the source of Jesus’ agency in the Father.³⁴ We may conclude, then, that Peter responds to Jesus as the one who brings the revelation of God. He recognises Jesus as the unique representative of God, who as Wisdom incarnate is superior to all other agents of God.

A sense of judgment pervades the closing verses of the sixth chapter of John. Correctly Bultmann³⁵ understood the Jesus of these verses as coming with life in one hand and judgement in the other. There is a scandal, a drawing back from following Jesus, and

³³There is some debate among scholars with regard to the status of Peter’s confession. So R.A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in literary design* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1983) 120f. considers that Peter has ‘grasped the importance of Jesus’ words’ but fails to understand Jesus’ destiny. J. Painter, ‘Tradition and interpretation in John 6’ *NTS* 35 (1989) 421-50 esp. 447 suggests that although the title is not as important as the more frequent Johannine titles, it nevertheless serves in this case as part of John’s commendation of Peter. Clearly, the point at issue is the place of Peter in the Gospel. On this topic see A.J. Droge, ‘The status of Peter in the Fourth Gospel: John 18:10-11’ *JBL* 109 (1990) 307-11.

³⁴On the subordination of Jesus to the Father, see C.K. Barrett, ‘The Father is greater than I (Jn. 14:28): Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament’ *Neues Testament und Kirche*, J. Gnllka (ed.) (Freiburg, Herder 1974) 144-159. On the agency of Jesus see P. Borgen, ‘God’s agent in the Fourth Gospel’ *Religions in Antiquity*, J. Neusner (ed.) (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1968) 137-48 and Buehner, *op. cit.*, passim.

³⁵*Op. cit.*, 450 where he writes that the Holy One of God is the ‘Revealer who has the ἐξουσία of κρίνειν and of ζωοποιεῖν (5.21, 27)’.

judgment. At the same time Peter and others find life in Jesus. In a dualism of belief versus unbelief, as here in the Fourth Gospel, Peter could no more easily be called a devil, or Satan, than a demon could confess Jesus as the Holy One of God. The theology of the Gospel mitigates against such anomalies. Yet there is a sense of conflict, similar to that discerned in the Synoptic gospels, but instead of a demon possessed man, we have Judas. Following verse 70, he is the devil (διάβολος) who is judged by the Holy One of God. The essence of the Holy One finds its fullest expression in the Johannine picture of Jesus, the Wisdom of God, who divides humankind in two.

V. John 6 and the Johannine Community

The history of the Johannine community impinges at two points in the course of chapter 6, verses 66 and 69. The first incident centres around the turning back of many of the disciples (v. 66). Scholars have long argued on the basis of the First Epistle of John, that the community was divided by dissension and so split into at least two factions.³⁶ Opinions differ about the cause of this split, but following 1 John 4:2 it had to do with the ‘flesh’ of Jesus—perhaps a downplaying of the relevance of Jesus’ life for salvation.³⁷ Since the thrust of the much debated eucharistic section (John 6:51c-9) is towards an emphasis on Jesus’ flesh and blood as real flesh and blood (v. 55), one might suggest that John 6 mirrors the same dissension as the First Epistle. The σκληρός λόγος which divides the community (v. 60) and the σκανδαλίζει (v. 61) revolve around the paradox of a divine but human Jesus.

The second incident is the response of Peter to the question, ‘You will not also go away, will you?’ (v. 67). Jesus speaks not only to his first disciples, but here existentially to the Johannine community. Peter thus responds in verse 69 as the spokesman of the community, and of all true believers, in affirming his faith in the divine/human nature of Jesus. He speaks from the *post-resurrection* standpoint of the Johannine community. He affirms the Johannine

³⁶1 Jn. 2:19 mentions a schism. See particularly R.E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York, Doubleday 1982) 47-86.

³⁷ See my article, ‘The Holy One of God as a title for Jesus’ *Neotestamentica* 19 (1985) 9-17 esp. 14 and J. Painter, *op. cit.*, 421-50 esp. 446f. Painter understands the chapter as belonging to the latest edition of the Gospel contemporary with ch. 21. So Brown *op. cit.*, 77

belief in the scandal of the incarnation—the paradox of a human agent who performs divine deeds and makes divine claims. He testifies to the judgment of Jesus and his gift of eternal life. He affirms that the locus of revelation is the believing community of the Fourth Gospel.

VI. Conclusion

In common with the Old Testament use of the title, ‘The Holy One of God’ in the Gospels contains the primary sense of an Agent of God, whose attribute of holiness confirms his close relationship with his principal (God). Jesus, however, is the agent of God *par excellence*.

Secondly Jesus as the Holy One serves a representative function (like Wisdom or Michael) mediating between God’s realm of the holy and the human level of the profane. He represents the sphere of the divine.

Thirdly, the title lays stress upon the judgment brought by Jesus, both on the squealing demons and in John upon the schismatics of the community, whom Judas represents. Jesus is the divine judge.

Finally, in John’s Gospel, the title underlines Jesus’ role as the bringer of eternal life to the believers, represented by Peter, who are able to glimpse through the real flesh and blood of Jesus, the paradox of the incarnation. Jesus, in John 6:69, is the divine agent of God who proceeds from above, and who divides the world with his words of life, into the realms of darkness and of light. As such the title ‘the Holy One of God’ ranks above messiah and prophet, and alongside the definitive titles of Son of God and Son of Man as used by John.