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0521803489 - John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology

James F. McGrath

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**JOHN'S APOLOGETIC CHRISTOLOGY
LEGITIMATION AND DEVELOPMENT
IN JOHANNINE CHRISTOLOGY**

The Gospel according to John presents Jesus in a unique way as compared with other New Testament writings. Scholars have long puzzled and pondered over why this should be. In this book, James McGrath offers a convincing explanation of how and why the author of the Fourth Gospel arrived at a christological portrait of Jesus that is so different from that of other New Testament authors, and yet at the same time clearly has its roots in earlier tradition. McGrath suggests that as the author of this Gospel sought to defend his beliefs about Jesus against the objections brought by opponents, he developed and drew out further implications from the beliefs he inherited. The book studies this process using insights from the field of sociology which helps to bring methodological clarity to the important issue of the development of Johannine Christology.

James F. McGrath has been Lecturer in New Testament Studies at Emanuel University, Oradea and the University of Oradea, Romania for the past three years. He has published articles in *New Testament Studies*, *Irish Biblical Studies*, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, *Religion and Theology* and *Koinonia Journal*.

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PREFACE

Having studied John's Gospel over several years, I was glad when a recent visit to the US included an invitation to teach a freshman class on the subject. I had had surprisingly little opportunity to do so since completing the research presented in this book. My usual theme – that of John's apologetic portrait of Jesus – was, however, met by a perplexed look from one student. Raising her hand, she asked, 'What makes you think John is being apologetic?'

It took me a few moments to realize that the 'technical' meaning of the term 'apologetic' is unfamiliar to many in our day and age. I should perhaps therefore explain that the title of this book, *John's Apologetic Christology*, does not use the term in its modern sense, as if John were 'apologizing' for his beliefs concerning Jesus. Rather, the argument of the present work is that John's *defence* (the other meaning of 'apologetic') of certain christological beliefs led to their development and the unique configuration of christological motifs known as Johannine Christology. It would be a pity indeed if a merely verbal confusion were to obscure this book's main theme from the outset!

The book is a revised version of my 1998 University of Durham Ph.D. dissertation. While a Ph.D. thesis is by definition the work of a single individual, I doubt whether any student has ever successfully completed such a course of study without the support of many people, the endless list of 'without whoms'. Here I have attempted to thank in particular some of the key friends, encouragers and supporters who have made the completion of this work possible, representatives of a much larger number of individuals who provided advice, support and encouragement at many points throughout this project.

In relation to the academic side of this work, I wish to thank above all Prof. James Dunn for his supervision, providing helpful guidance and insightful criticisms throughout my period of re-

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search; Prof. Larry Hurtado, Dr Stephen Barton, Dr Paul N. Anderson, Prof. Richard Bauckham and Mr Jerry Truex, for their helpful comments, constructive criticisms and advice; the members of the Durham New Testament Seminar from 1995 to 1998 and of the JOHN-LITR and IOUDAIOS-L discussion groups for feedback and countless useful pieces of information; and Ray Porter and Eryl Rowlands for teaching me about the Gospel of John and helping me to fall in love with it. All faults with the book of course remain my own.

For financial assistance, I wish to thank in particular the Miss Elizabeth Drummond's Trust, the Mylne Trust, the Gilchrist Educational Trust and the De Bury Scholarship for their help with the cost of undertaking and completing this course of study. Many others are to be thanked for their help in times of crisis, with the cost of books and/or attending conferences, and for various other forms of financial support, among them especially the Dean's Fund, Ted and Mary Baines, the Romanian Missionary Society, Trinity Tabernacle of Gravesend, the Listeners Trust, the New Durlston Trust and the Butterworth and Bayley Charity.

Lastly, but most of all rather than least, my wife Elena, for providing encouragement and support from before the beginning of this project until its completion.