This slightly revised doctoral thesis, completed in 2003 for the Australian College of Theology under Rikki Watts and Johan Ferreira, sets out to make a contribution to the discussion of Johannine Christology by examining the references to Jesus’ emotions in the Fourth Gospel. The thesis opens with a brief description of “the current debate.” The author identifies three major positions: Jesus as “merely human,” attributed to Rudolf Bultmann (6–9); Jesus as “only divine,” attributed to Ernst Käsemann (9–11); and Jesus as “both human and divine,” represented by Rudolf Schnackenburg (11–13). The titles are unfortunately simplistic, but the actual discussion more differentiating. It is sufficient to establish the relevance of embarking on a study of the “emotions” of Jesus, but not for a more detailed engagement of the issues that the work promises.

The real strength of this study lies in its examination of the emotions of Jesus in John, not in the engagement with the current issues in Johannine Christology. The author’s own delineation of its focus makes clear that it is not a study in dogmatics (14), in “the historical Jesus” (15), in “the psychological or biographical,” but is primarily an exegetical discussion of “the Fourth Gospel as a literary unit” (17–20). Lexical considerations and
potentially relevant psychological observations are to be taken up primarily within this context (21–29).

Chapter 2 considers John’s religious setting. Here we find above all a discussion of emotions attributed to God in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Septuagint, carefully nuanced, and the proposal that such emotions are helpfully considered within the framework of covenant thinking. The focus is not the writings differentiated to their setting and origins, but as a whole. Covenant, while sometimes explicitly mentioned in the texts, is generally treated as a conceptual setting in which to speak of a relationship in which emotions are then explained. The author limits himself to God’s side of the relationship. That will later become relevant for the thesis. One might have gained some mileage by looking at emotions on the other side of the relationship, particularly because the human side is significant for the thesis. The coverage of other literature, including the “Apocrypha” notes 4 Maccabees and its treatment of emotions, but only in passing. Later the author wonders if Luke has toned emotions down (59–60). Some treatment of emotions in the non-Jewish writings of John’s setting would have strengthened the treatment.

The discussion of the setting also surveys the other three Gospels. Some emotions of Jesus “would appear to point in the direction of divinity” (61), such as joy at the success of mission and compassion (exclusively in the context of miracles and widely used of God in the Old Testament and Pseudepigrapha). Some “seem to underscore his divinity” (61), such as amazement, but also foreboding and distress in relation to the passion. Others are less easily classified. Such categorizing could easily become superficial, but the author exercises due care. Again covenant serves as a framework within which to locate emotional responses and to explain why sometimes Jesus exhibits emotions associated mostly with God in the tradition (62–65).

The venture into John’s Gospel begins with a well-argued case that John is to be read closely with the Pentateuch and reflects its motifs at many points. It then moves to careful review of analyses of John’s structure. Locating the emotions within this structure throws up some notable differences between John and the other Gospels. The references to emotions are not spread throughout the Gospel but are concentrated in John 11 (the raising of Lazarus) and John 13–17 (the last discourses), and so in Jerusalem. Before proceeding to analyze these, the author returns to the parallels with the Pentateuch and brings out that in John Jesus is never paralleled with its heroes but consistently with God (often in events, festivals, and images). This coheres with seeing a covenant framework also in John in which Jesus stands “on the side of the covenant Lord” (96).
“Wherever the Fourth Gospel is dependent on the Pentateuch, the identity of Jesus can be plotted along two axes: (a) He assumes the roles of the creator of Genesis, the miracle working Redeemer of Exodus, and the Lord who renews the covenant with his people in Deuteronomy…. (b) He became flesh, and as the suffering Servant and righteous suffered he fulfilled the role of the sacrificial Lamb of God…. he comes the covenant sacrifice” 

(109). The case is well argued, although the author may have moved too quickly toward the notion of “covenant sacrifice” for which he assumes the centrality of vicarious sacrificial atonement in John, whose centrality others, including the reviewer, have questioned, although the author does not engage the issue. The main argument being developed here is that these two aspects provide a framework for considering the references to emotions in John. The overall covenant framework sits well with the Johannine material because there are substantial links, especially with Deuteronomy in the last discourses.

Chapter 4 examines the reference to “zeal” (inside a quotation from a psalm) in the account of the cleansing of the temple. Were traditio-historical perspectives also in view, the author might have drawn attention to the probability that it also belongs with the material immediately preceding the passion. There might have been some discussion of why Jesus might have had zeal for the temple—which is the literal meaning underneath John’s symbolic overlay. The author concludes that the accent falls on the human emotion of zeal.

Chapter 5 offers a fine discussion of John 11 with its intertwining of human emotion and divine foreknowledge. It includes a careful linguistic excurse on the verbs for “to love” and discussions of joy, anger, being troubled, and tears. The author finds an interplay between divine and human emotions. The latter include affection for the family and Jesus bursting into tears. With Jesus’ joy (11:15) and being disturbed (11:33), we have human emotion informed by divine foreknowledge that intensifies the feeling. This combination also helps to explain the next two references to Jesus being disturbed (12:27; 13:21) and to his responses of anger.

Chapter 6 focuses on “the turning point” in John’s narrative structure, which the author had earlier argued consisted of John 12–13. It builds on observations from the previous chapter in discussing 12:27; 13:21, deals convincingly with the complex exegetical issues surrounding Judas’s betrayal in the preceding context of 13:21, and brings out echoes between John 13 and the exodus motifs, including hardening and the “I am” motif. The chapter also explains Jesus’ foreknowledge as knowing that he was about to “do battle with the ruler of this world” (219; similarly 239). Does John really envisage a battle, a struggle? The struggle seems to be rather in facing the prospect of suffering, not in any vulnerability that he might not succeed (as battle anxiety would suggest).
Chapter 7 treats the final chapters in the Gospel. It includes a discussion of tenses of the verbs for “to love,” showing that when John employs the aorist of Jesus it tends to underscore his divine functions, whereas the imperfect is used more of human love. Covenant love is a feature of Deuteronomy that has influenced the Farewell Discourses. There is an excellent discussion of the centrality of the love relationships in John 14. In John 15 giving one’s life for one’s friends is interpreted predictably in terms of vicarious atonement, “sacrificial love,” “covenant sacrifice” (a non-Johannine term and image). The love for the beloved disciple becomes a love for all who become Jesus’ brothers.

Altogether this is a valuable discussion of the emotions of Jesus in John. It establishes the background out of which such statements are made, namely, the relationship of Yahweh and the people in the Old Testament. That can be described as covenantal, and this is a framework for understanding the references to God’s emotions in subsequent tradition. It is particularly apt for John’s Gospel, which, though not continuing the word covenant, draws on covenant traditions of love and has been developed in the light of the Pentateuch. The author avoids what could easily have been a superficial allocation of emotions to the human or divine side of Jesus and so avoids building on what would be inadequate categories with which to measure John’s Christology. Many of the emotions are clearly both, as Jesus responds in human emotion to supernatural foreknowledge of events. The work succeeds in giving a learned account of the emotions of Jesus in John.

It contributes a valuable resource for the broader discussion of the nature of Johannine Christology, without engaging the “current debate” that it outlines in the introduction. Käsemann might well have agreed with the finding about human emotion with supernatural foreknowledge and called on it to support his view of naïve docetism. His argument was also that in dialogues Jesus exercises such foreknowledge and super wisdom to toy with opponents. Scholarly discussion of the issues beyond Bultmann, Käsemann, and Schnackenburg is not addressed. Nevertheless, the path that is pursued leads to an important contribution that all such discussions in the future will need to take into account.