

The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6. By Paul N. Anderson. WUNT 78. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996, xv + 329 pp., n. p.*

In his foreword, D. Moody Smith calls this work "at once one of the most concentrated and intensive exegetical studies and one of the most wide-ranging and suggestive essays on Johannine christology that I have seen" (p. iii). After reading Anderson's far-reaching work, I could not agree more. Here is a work as seminal and suggestive as R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. In its conversance with biblical scholarship, its exegetical competence, and its bold application of extra-biblical paradigms to Johannine studies, this investigation leaves one amazed at the work's scope and potential impact on the future interpretation of John's Gospel. While I do not agree with some of Anderson's more speculative comments regarding John's socio-religious environment (see e.g. pp. 139, 220, and 245–48), I urge everyone interested in the interpretation of John's Gospel to read, and digest, Anderson's work. It is certain to break new ground in Johannine scholarship.

What is the goal of Anderson's study? As he himself puts it, it is "to gain clearer insight into the christological tensions of the Fourth Gospel by means of seeking a deeper understanding of the dialectical process of thought by which the evangelist has come to embrace such a distinctly unitive and disunitive christology" (p. 15). In pursuing this purpose, Anderson focuses on chap. 6, the feeding of the five thousand and subsequent events and discourses. Taking his starting point with Rudolf Bultmann, Anderson accepts that scholar's identification of tensions in John while rejecting Bultmann's efforts to resolve these tensions by source and rearrangement theories. Rather than resorting to source or redaction criticism, Anderson views these tensions in terms of an independent reflection upon the same event recounted somewhat differently in the Synoptics. Drawing on the research of Fowler and Loder, the author applies their insights regarding the experience and development of faith to John's Gospel.

The basic assumption at the outset of Anderson's study is that the fourth gospel evidences Christological tensions, evidently because both sides used passages from John's Gospel in the christological controversies of the early church. Anderson names three such tensions: (1) John's "exalted" vs. "subordinationist" Christology; (2) signs as facilitating belief vs. as having existential significance; and (3) the Gospel's present vs. future eschatology. He lists the following ways of dealing with these tensions: denying their existence (common until the nineteenth century), or attributing them either to John himself (Anderson's view) or to his sources (Bultmann).

Anderson's survey of recent approaches to the fourth gospel's Christology focuses particularly on C. K. Barrett's characterization of John's theology as "dialectical." While concurring with Barrett's basic analysis, Anderson seeks to take his discussion one step further by exploring why John came to think dialectically and probing John's socio-religious context. In chap. 7, clearly the most important of this book, Anderson breaks new ground by applying two models of faith development to the fourth gospel: a developmental model by J. Fowler and a transformational, more crisis-oriented approach by J. Loder. Fowler's model suggests to Anderson John's dialectical mode of reflection, while Loder's transformational approach signals the "value of subjective, relational-type connectedness to the living Lord" (p. 150).

Significantly, Anderson contends that "many of John's christological tensions cannot simply be ascribed to the evangelist's socio-religious "dialogues" with the Synagogue, Samaritans, or even other Christians. Jesus' discourses in chaps. 5, 6, 8, 10, 13–17, etc. betray the dialectical thinking of one who refuses to reduce his christology to a definitive and monological statement. Thus, the 'dialogues' within the thinking of the evangelist must also be explored" (p. 148, n. 11). According to Anderson, John is "a reflective, dialogical thinker, who is constantly pushing the limits of his christology to accommodate the polarities of christocentric experiences and socio-religious tensions he has encountered: (p. 152, n. 19). Specifically, the author contends that John engaged in two kinds

of reflection: the existentializing of events from Jesus' ministry (especially his signs) and the interpretation of christocentric encounters with God the evangelist had experienced (p. 166).

Anderson describes the Christology of the fourth evangelist as "less dogmatic and far more tolerant of ambiguity" than the Johannine epistles, a fact that Anderson considers to be the strongest argument for a difference in authorship between the epistles and the Johannine gospel (p. 250). Elsewhere, the author contends that Johannine authorship continues to be a valid option, referring particularly to an overlooked Johannine passage, Acts 4:20, which reads: "We announce to you *what we have seen and heard* in order that you might have fellowship with us" (italics mine).

Overall, this is an astonishing, groundbreaking piece of work. It is at times a bit wordy and would benefit from further editorial tightening. Exception has already been taken to Anderson's tendency toward conjecture regarding John's socio-religious environment. Also, one may question Anderson's characterization of the different elements of Johannine Christology as "tensions." But these are relatively small criticisms in light of the scope and caliber of this study. Those who engage in further Johannine scholarship without having read this work will do so at their own peril.

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