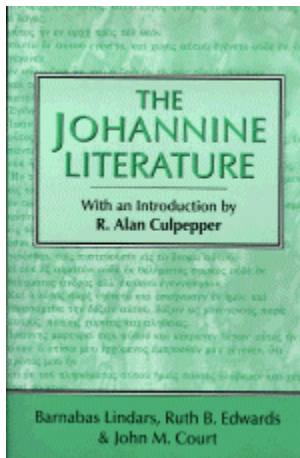


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**Lindars, Barnabas, Ruth B. Edwards, and John M. Court**

*The Johannine Literature*

Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000. Pp. 324, Cloth, \$28.50, ISBN 1841270814.

Introduction by R. Alan Culpepper

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This volume combines three Sheffield New Testament Guides that were previously published separately. Accordingly, each section of the current volume retains its own distinctive format and perspective. The writers recognize certain affinities between the Gospel of John, the Johannine Epistles, and Revelation, but do not assume that these texts stem from a common author. The closest relationships are understood to be between the Gospel and Epistles, with Revelation showing more independence of thought. Culpepper's introduction summarizes early Christian traditions pertaining to authorship and assesses the similarities and differences in the thought and language of the various writings. As a working hypothesis he suggests that readers think of these texts emerging from a Johannine school.

Lindars cautions against looking for a straight historical presentation of Jesus' words and deeds in the Gospel of John. The gospel seems to combine various sources, including homilies by the evangelist, which are worked into the discourses ascribed to Jesus. Developing a proposal by Rudolf Bultmann, Lindars also argues that the Beloved Disciple, whose witness is said to underlie the gospel (John 21:24), was not a historical figure but a creation of the evangelist. The Beloved Disciple represents true discipleship and "will continue to follow Jesus until he comes again—precisely because he is the model for every reader" (p. 45). Theologically, the gospel message of salvation centers on life or eternal life. Lindars maintains that John's gospel does not teach a fully realized eschatology in which the future is entirely absorbed by the present, but announces that conditions of the future are already available in a manner that anticipates their

consummation. The reality of salvation centers on the notion of a personal relationship with Jesus, a relationship described as “believing in” or “into” Christ.

Edwards introduces the Johannine Epistles by focusing on 3 John because in form it can be identified as a letter and its content is a fairly straightforward discussion of issues pertaining to hospitality. Second John, could be a genuine letter as well, although it shows signs of being an artificial creation that recasts elements from 1 and 3 John. First John is more difficult because its form and outline do not conform to established patterns. Theologically, Edwards challenges the idea that the purpose of the epistles was primarily polemical. Although opponents are mentioned in these writings, the primary concern is not to combat heresy but to encourage readers and to build up spiritual discernment. After summarizing various theories concerning the identity of the opponents, she concludes that the precise historical situation of the epistles is not now recoverable. Readers of 1 John have sometimes gotten the impression that the author works tenaciously and inflexibly with a small number of points, but Edwards argues that the opposite is perhaps more accurate: the author provides “a rich mine of theological ideas, sometimes expressed in metaphorical and tantalizingly imprecise language” (p. 172). The most important theological contribution of these writings is the insight that Christian love is grounded in divine love. This stance sets Christianity apart from religions based on fear, and the insistence that love of God extends to love of other people cautions against hypocrisy.

Court begins the final section of this volume with a sketch of major developments in the study of Revelation during the past thirty years and a survey of the current pluralism in methods of biblical interpretation. A presentation of main themes from Revelation follows. The visions of God and Christ are designed to generate confidence in God’s salvation, whatever the future may hold. Visions of the church in the world show a Christ-centered community of faith worshiping and witnessing in the face of opposition. Visions of creation exhibit a vital tension between a celebration of the world and its Creator and a recognition of the fragility of ecological, social, and economic systems. He rightly points out that the powers rivaling God threaten not only the church but also the creation. The result is a reading of Revelation that presses Christians toward engagement with rather than resignation to the threatening powers of their time. Court maintains that Revelation reflects a Christian group with a very positive sense of mission to the world. Central to Revelation’s outlook is the idea of witness, which means communicating the gospel message in the context of a prophetic community.

This volume is readable and balanced in its approach. Since the three principal sections were originally written as separate pieces, there is no attempt to create a new synthesis of the texts traditionally called “Johannine.” Those teaching courses on these NT writings will find the contributions in this volume to be helpful companion pieces.