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eds.**

Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel

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Possibly no other feature of the Gospel of John stirs more consternation and debate than the hostility it expresses toward Jews and Judaism. This large volume presents the best of contemporary scholarship on this obstinate issue. It contains twenty-five articles written by participants in the Interdisciplinary Academic Seminar held in Leuven in January 2000. The seminar was a part of a larger research program at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) devoted to "The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Dialogue." The participants represent an international, interdisciplinary, and interreligious community brought together around this troublesome issue and include theologians and philosophers as well as New Testament scholars.

The articles are divided into four broad categories, the first of which is entitled "Analysis" and includes one article entitled, "Wrestling with Johannine Anti-Judaism." Here the book's three editors provide a hermeneutical context for the discussion that follows. They conclude their initial analysis of the topic by claiming that John's "all-inclusive love ... transcends its anti-Judaism" (44).

Part 2 of the book deals with "General Approaches," and each of the articles conceives the question of Johannine anti-Judaism within a broad context. The first six essays are called "Exegetical Approaches." James D. G. Dunn urges us to read John in its historical context, which entailed the factionalism of Judaism after 70 C.E., and to read it as an intra-Jewish dialogue written in a polemic style typical of the day. R. Alan Culpepper discusses Johannine anti-Judaism as a "theological problem for interpreters" and makes a case that, as a whole, Johannine theology deconstructs the Gospel's anti-Jewishness. Judith M. Lieu attempts to analyze the issue by means of a dialogical understanding of canon and revelation, while Stephen Motyer appeals for a "new start" by means of the use of reception theory.

The remaining four essays in the second category are “Systematic Approaches” to the problem. Simon Schoon describes how a “canon within a canon” might resolve interpreters’ dilemma when reading John, and Roger Burggraeve in effect proposes that “Biblical Thinking As the Wisdom of Love” is one such canon. The Gospel exhibits an intra-Jewish polemic, contends Bertold Kalappert, and Henkrik Hoet agrees in principle, suggesting that John 8:39 is typical of a dispute among Jewish leaders of the time. Moreover, the dispute is similar to the conflict Paul faced regarding the place of the law in Christian faith and life.

The largest of the book’s four sections is entitled “Specific Topics,” and it in turn is divided into two parts: the first relentlessly pursues the identity of “the Jews,” and the second examines the meaning of some key passages. In the case of the identity of “the Jews,” the contributors invite readers to understand the expression to refer variously to Jewish leaders, non-Johannine Christians who reject the Gospel’s high Christology, and Jewish Christians in an intra-Jewish discussion. Raymond F. Collins proposes a narrative approach in which the plot’s climax comes with Jesus being enthroned as “king of the Jews,” and Peter J. Tomson traces a trajectory of the meaning of “Jew” through John and on to contemporary Christians, who are now responsible for reshaping that tradition. In a marvelously direct article, Adele Reinhartz warns against easy solutions and stresses that the anti-Jewish theme is inherent to the Gospel itself and not simply part of an interpretive tradition. Against others’ claim that the Gospel’s emphasis on love diminishes its anti-Jewishness, Reinhartz believes it is the other way around: the Evangelist’s anti-Judaism undermines the Gospel’s declaration of God’s inclusive and boundless love.

The essays devoted to “Significant Texts” provide studies of the Nicodemus passages; 4:22b; 8:38-47; 9:13-17, 24-34; the Farewell Discourses; 11:54; and 14:6. A final essay in this part examines Rev 2:9 and 3:9. Jean-Marie Sevrin concludes the study of Nicodemus with the claim that this “ruler of the Jews” represents an “in-between” position with regard to Jesus—neither believing nor rejecting him—thus demonstrating that the supposed either-or of Johannine theology is not as absolute as some have thought. Moreover, Nicodemus’s story issues an invitation to Jews to embrace Christ. A number of essays in the book address the apparent contradiction between 4:22 and 8:48, and several contributors to part 3 deal with that contradiction. C. K. Barrett maintains that these two passages are examples of John’s dialectical theology, and Urban C. von Wahlde argues that 8:42 demonstrates a pattern of polemic and means simply that the Jews have not accepted God’s revelation in Christ. According to Maareten J. J. Menken, John 9 reflects a very Jewish discussion of whether Jesus is a false prophet or a prophet like Moses. However, James Charlesworth urges us to discard John’s anti-Judaism as secondary accretions to the Gospel.

The final section is a “Synthesis” in which an ecumenical and foundational theologian, Hans Hermann Henrix, boldly attempts to pull the issues of canon, revelation, and

reception together. These final pages provide a thoughtful integration of the most significant issues entailed in reading and interpreting John's anti-Judaism. A comprehensive twenty-one-page bibliography concludes the volume, along with indices of authors, subjects, and sources.

Patient readers will come away from this book with a keen sense of the hermeneutical issues arising from the problem of John's anti-Judaism, an exhaustive review and critique of the various efforts to deal with it, and plentiful insights from careful exegetical studies. The wide-ranging topics of the articles furnish an impressive and inclusive review of what seems to be all of the conceivable positions on the topic of anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John. Most commendably, the editors and contributors generally move beyond easy solutions and dig more deeply into matters of the canon and biblical authority. In that sense, the essays tend to pursue the problem until it is traced to current readers and how we treat biblical content, thus making it our problem. A good number of the authors explicitly relate the question of anti-Judaism in the New Testament with the need for dialogue and mutual appreciation between Christians and Jews today. In his conclusion, Henrix reports that some in the conference sought a criterion by which the value of passages could be determined, while others stressed the dual nature of the Bible as both word of God and human word. The readers of this volume are left to grapple with those options as well as all the exegetical issues the essays raise.

In a collection such as this, one expects the essays to vary in their effectiveness, and that expectation is fulfilled by this volume. The categories into which the essays are divided are not very helpful and sometimes are not precise in designating the content of the articles grouped under them. Moreover, some of the articles are repetitious, particularly in reviewing the different types of efforts to resolve the subject. The two articles on anti-Judaism in the Apocalypse seem only tangentially related to the book's theme, especially since neither of them establishes a clear relationship between the Gospel of John and Revelation. Nonetheless, the breadth of the essays increases the value of the collection.

Taken together, these articles set a new standard for the discussion of the Fourth Evangelist's seeming hostility toward Christianity's parent religion. Equally important, they challenge us to rethink our views of biblical authority and how Scripture can be appropriated for the present day.