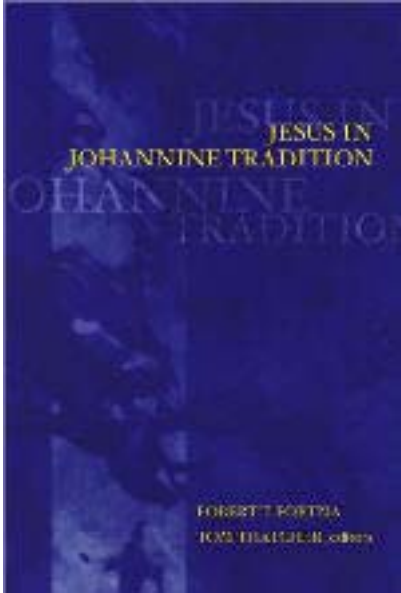


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Jesus in Johannine Tradition

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Maybe more than any other New Testament document, the Fourth Gospel has been analyzed in fresh and promising ways in order to finally solve the various “riddles” that surround its interpretive history. Being itself a Gospel about Jesus, its relation to Jesus has always been one of the most pressing questions asked from the text. While this book is not a Johannine scholarship survey like the works of Howard (*The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation*) and Kysar (*The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel*), its comprehensive nature certainly alludes to its overarching value. This book is attempting “to take a serious look at the issues and questions to be addressed in reconstructing the process that produced our Fourth Gospel” (1). Its overall goal is to highlight “the diversity of methods and perspectives that inform current study of the Johannine Jesus tradition and the composition history of the Fourth Gospel” (353). The book is divided into three parts: “The Fourth Gospel and Jesus”; “The Fourth Evangelist’s Sources”; and “The Fourth Gospel and Noncanonical Literature.” Throughout these three parts there are thirty chapters written by twenty-eight scholars who come from intentionally diverse positions in relation to one another. Before we evaluate the book’s value, a survey of the three parts and their contents is in order.

The first part of the book, "The Fourth Gospel and Jesus," is divided into two sections. According to the editors, all the authors in this section have been asked to address the relevant questions "not from a purely historical perspective but also in terms of the ways in which the relationship between the Fourth Evangelist and Jesus may have influenced the presentation of Jesus in the current text of the Fourth Gospel" (11).

In the section entitled "The Fourth Evangelist's Kerygma," David Resenberger argues that the complexities in the Gospel that often lead interpreters down various trails should be seen as intentional. The concept of Jesus "coming" or "being sent by God" into the world, intermixed with the variety of poetry and paradox found only in John, deliberately invites the reader away from "an abstract doctrinal affirmation" but toward "a response to Jesus himself" (16). In the same way, Gail R. O'Day argues that "the theological reality of the incarnation . . . is the shaping hermeneutical principle of the creation of this Gospel" (29). The Fourth Evangelist weaves together narrative and theology in an attempt to open up the wonder and mystery of the incarnation so that readers can know themselves and be the recipients of Jesus' gifts.

In the section entitled "The Fourth Gospel and Jesus," various aspects of the historical nature and intention of John's Gospel are discussed. Gary Burge argues against the pure Johannine community interpretive approach and sees the Fourth Gospel as combining an uncompromising historical tradition with "a Spirit-inspired interpretation probing deeper meanings of Christ that were barely understood by Jesus' original audiences" (43). Jeffrey L. Staley argues that "issues related to the status of the interpreter and his ideological commitments have challenged the historical positivism of past reconstructions of the Johannine community and its texts and have pointed out the tenuous nature of those theories" (48). For Staley, a two-tiered witness motif, that is, the pre-Easter and post-Easter redactional activity, can be witnessed in the text by all. However, the text reveals a remarkable unified rhetorical strategy so that the final form of the text bears a cohesive whole that is itself worthy of interpretive justice, a justice that is aware of what the postmodern era has shown to be ideological tendencies in all historical reconstruction (57). Arthur J. Dewey argues that the historical presentation is not historical in the modern sense but is so by means of a visionary consciousness. "Through enlisting the symbolic presence of the Paraclete, the Fourth Evangelist provides the means for every reader," not just the initial so-called eyewitness, "to become an active participant in the epiphany of the death of Jesus" (60). Craig Blomberg argues that "by the standards of his day," the Fourth Gospel reveals itself to be historically accurate and theologically

trustworthy (82). Ingo Broer argues that, although not all the geographic insights in John are completely exact (most notably the porticoes of Bethesda), the information given allows the interpreter to know something of the author's background knowledge as well as the audience for whom the document was intended. Tom Thatcher argues that, based upon an anthropological model of legendary storytellers, the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel can be understood as a legend that had retrojected upon it various strata of developing traditions, witnessed fully in the final edited form of the Gospel. Although the Beloved Disciple was certainly a historical person, the legend attributed to him that is revealed can be deduced as legendary from the Gospel text (97). Finally, Richard Bauckham argues against the mainstream Johannine community hypothesis by placing the Gospel of John not within a closed and sectarian community but as a document intended for an "open and indefinite group of communities: any and every Christian community of the time in which Greek was understood" (103).

The second part of the book, "The Fourth Evangelist's Sources" is divided into three sections. According to the editors, all the authors in this section have been asked "to focus their discussion not only on specific sources that the Fourth Evangelist may have used, but on the ways he may have used them and how this has shaped the presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel" (114).

In the section entitled "John and the Synoptics," Walter Wink argues that the importance of the term "Son of Man" in John is seen not only in its consistent use but in its different meaning from the Synoptics. Instead of being used to describe Jesus in an apocalyptic way, the Fourth Gospel uses "Son of Man" to identify Jesus "with the Human Being from all eternity" (120). John is intent on showing Jesus in his archetypal form; all can now know God through Jesus (123). Chrys C. Caragounis attempts to show that the contact between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics' use of "kingdom of God" reveals that they "share a common slate of traditions" (126), but the Fourth Gospel specifically places the kingdom of God not purely at the eschaton, like the Synoptics, but more in the present. "In Jesus' ministry the Eschaton is brought into contact with the present, because both the Kingdom of God and the Eschaton are bound up with Jesus' person" (133); one's rejection or acceptance of Jesus in the present is determinative of one's future. In this way, the eschatology of Fourth Gospel is future, but the future is decided in the present (faith and belief). Graham H. Twelftree argues that the lack of exorcisms in Fourth Gospel has not been adequately answered in the past; for John, rather than showing individual battles with Satan, the entire Gospel is a battle with Satan, the Father of Lies, who is trying to win the battle of unbelief.

Mark A. Matson argues that not only should John's location of the temple incident in Jesus' ministry been seen as historically possible as the Synoptics' version, but that it also functions in the developing narrative in an integral way, anticipating and framing the entire Gospel story (149). John M. Perry argues that while both John and the Synoptics use related tradition concerning the sacraments, each modifies the common tradition for their own theological tendencies. In John, this tendency is intended for the Johannine community. Johannes Beutler argues that, although John 13–17 relies on a tradition of a Synoptic character and perhaps even derived from the Synoptics themselves, no single coherent discourse can be uncovered. Rather, the Farewell Discourse reflects the "creative use of the traditional material, forging it into a new form that expresses Fourth Evangelist's peculiar view of Jesus" (172). Finally, Paul N. Anderson argues that since John and Mark developed in their own yet parallel ways, these two Gospels should be considered the "bi-optic" Gospels (175). Rather than trying simplistically to define either one's use or nonuse of the other, it is better to see Mark and John as reflecting "two parallel perspectives on Jesus' ministry that may have been dialogically engaged during the oral and written stages of their respective developments" (185).

In the section entitled, "The Signs Gospel," Tom Thatcher gives a historical survey of the Signs Source work in Fourth Gospel and places it in context of modern debate. Robert T. Fortna gives a fresh discussion of his Signs Source research, deals with arguments against it, and places it within the current discussion of Fourth Gospel's sources and historicity. Following the Signs Source discussion, Tom Felton and Tom Thatcher argue that using the more refined stylo-statistical method "adds further support" (218) to the existence of a unique Signs Source within the text of Fourth Gospel. Finally, Sara C. Winter argues that the unique role of dialogue in Fourth Gospel hints at the presence of discourse material in the Signs Gospel. In fact, "consideration of the Fourth Gospel as a whole shows that phrases and clauses in which the perfect tense occurs belong to a stage of composition between the Signs Gospel and the current text of John" (220).

In the section entitled "Oral Tradition," Joanna Dewey argues that, by appropriately placing early Christianity in its oral-dominated culture, a comparison of Fourth Gospel reveals that the Gospel "remains very close to the oral performance but is also indebted to writing" (251). In this way, we may have a better understanding of the prehistory of the Fourth Gospel. R. Alan Culpepper argues that the Fourth Evangelist uses the double-*amen* formula to introduce sayings that have been drawn from earlier Jesus traditions (253). Finally, Tom

Thatcher argues that an alternative analytical method of folkloristics, especially the research of the riddle, uncovers a substantial body of riddles in the dialogues of the Fourth Gospel. An analysis of these riddles reveals “a higher compositional unity than is typically supposed, and further ... that these dialogues emerged from a community seeking to establish its boundaries on the basis of common knowledge” that was understandable to this group alone (277).

The third and final part of the book, “The Fourth Gospel and Noncanonical Literature” has only one section. According to the editors this part’s “overarching concern is the way in which the authors of ... noncanonical documents have interpreted Jesus and how this informs our understanding of the way John has interpreted Jesus” (280). Christopher M. Tuckett argues that although Q has evidently influenced the Synoptics, “there is little evidence to justify the theory that the Fourth Gospel’s account is specifically based on the Q version of the story” (286). Edwin K. Broadhead argues that, although Q and the Fourth Gospel have some relations, they are distant at best, reflecting a relation that is based only upon some common pool of tradition. The ideological distance between Q and the Fourth Gospel could not be greater. “In contrast to earlier assumptions, Q and the Fourth Gospel are not total strangers; they are estranged cousins” (301). April D. DeConick applies tradition-rhetorical criticism to the Fourth Gospel and the *Gospel of Thomas* and argues the likelihood that the Fourth Gospel’s narrative reveals an actual conflict between the Johannine community and the Thomasine group (307). Alan Kirk argues that by applying the theory of social memory to the literature of the Fourth Gospel’s community, the trajectory of a Johannine pericope can be traced into the second-century in its retelling in the *Gospel of Peter*. Stephen J. Patterson argues that rather than debating the dubious prologue with a series of contrasts based on questionable assumptions, a fresh look at the old consensus (Bultmann’s) may give fresh insight. John Ashton argues that to truly understand the Johannine riddles we must approach the Fourth Gospel as Jesus asked of his own followers: by faith. “This means proceeding beyond the form-critical investigation of the original compositional setting of the Fourth Gospel’s riddles and into a deeper analysis of the mystery in which they are enclosed” (334). Finally, Catrin H. Williams argues that Jesus’ “I am” sayings had a two-level significance that revealed his unique identity “as the one in whom God is revealed and his saving promises are fulfilled” (352).

As Thatcher states in the conclusion, “This book is not offered as a review of the past but as a guidepost to the future” (353). There is no doubt that the value of this book is its up-to-date discussion of the latest issues in relation to Jesus as found within the Johannine tradition. The hobbies of the editors are definitely

present in this volume, most notably the four chapters (17--20) praising the efforts and attempting to confirm the existence of Fortna's Signs Source. Still, the book is broad enough to introduce the newcomer to various key issues in placing Jesus within the Johannine tradition and yet is also challenging enough for the Johannine scholar who desires to see the latest of methods applied. The areas that seem to have yielded the greatest fruit for future studies are the applications of history to the Johannine Jesus tradition (part 1, section 2) and the relationship between John and the Synoptics (part 2, section 1). Both seem to be pointing future research in the direction that places the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics on equal historical and literary footing, allowing each to have been informants of the other in a more dialectic way. In the end, the quality of each of the essays varies greatly; some are worth the price of the book themselves, while others are worth much less. However, that itself seems to have been the goal: to trace out new and fresh approaches for future studies, assuming that where dead ends appear, even if within the pages of this volume itself, then the research was valuable.