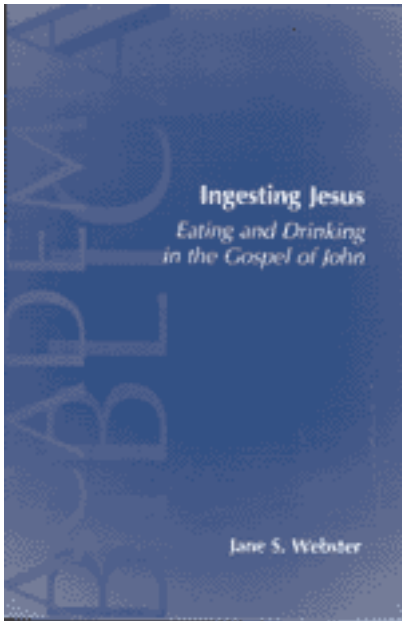


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Webster, Jane S.

Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John

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Ingesting Jesus focuses on passages relating to the motif of ingesting in the Gospel of John. This includes references to food or drink, actions related to eating or drinking, and even words drawn from the domain of ingesting, such as “consumed with zeal.” Attention is also given to the six stories that take place during a meal.

The structure of the book is clear and easy to follow. After an introduction, which maps out what is going to be done and how it is going to be done, eight chapters follow in which different sections dealing with ingesting receive attention. “The Lamb of God (1:29, 36)” is followed with “Water to Wine and Consumed with Zeal (2:1–11, 13–25).” The third chapter deals with “Living Water and Dying Food (4:4–42; 7:37–39; 12:24),” the fourth with “Tasting Life and Tasting Death (6:1–71; 8:51–52).” Two suppers follow: “Supper in Bethany (12:1–8)” and “The Last Supper (13:1–30; 15:1–17).” The discussion is closed with a conclusion, after the two last chapters are treated, namely, “First and Last Drink (19:28–37; 18:11)” and “Resurrection Breakfast (21:1–25).” There are also helpful indices.

Webster discusses the different passages where ingestion language is found in a typical exegetical way. For instance, in her discussion of the “Lamb of God,” the different

possibilities of interpreting this phrase are dealt with, after which she tries to make a case for “Lamb of God” referring to the Passover lamb. She concludes that the lamb image is primary sacrificial. She links the lamb to ingestion language via 6:50–51, where Jesus says that whoever wants eternal life should eat him. This link is made because the Passover lamb is “one of the few sacrifices that is eaten by the worshiper and that the eating of the lamb, in effect, ‘completes’ the sacrifice” (35). The reader of this review can decide for herself or himself whether these “links” are valid, especially since chapter 6 deals with manna and bread.

Most of the other chapters follow the same pattern. Webster gathers some of the available information from sources (by no means all and sometimes not the most important sources), presents the possibilities she found (such as ways to understand that particular section, possible background, etc.), gives a description of the content and its flow, and then draws a conclusion about that particular issue. The role of the disciples also receives constant attention.

The strength of these descriptions lies more in the gathering of the material than in opening new and motivated possibilities for understanding these passages. Another point that should also be noted is the contribution made by gathering different references to ingestion language in the Gospel of John. It is remarkable that, although awareness of the importance of eating and drinking in this Gospel exists in research and the social importance and implications of meals are well known, little has been done to analyze this motif in John. Drawing our attention anew to this topic and reminding us of the importance of this motif in this Gospel should be seen as a merit of this book.

There is, however, one serious shortcoming in this study from which all of us can learn and that relates to methodology. To work scientifically, we need methods that determine our approach to the material we study. Our methods set the margins and rules within which our work and analyses are presented to the wider community of scholars and on the basis of which our analyses are judged as valid or not. We should therefore give proper attention both to the validity as well as to the consistent application of our methods. One of the ways in which to determine the success of a study is by measuring the consistency with which the suggested methods are applied in the analysis.

In this book the method(s) used are described in the introduction. What is planned is impressive. I just refer to a few phrases from the introduction relating to what is planned. It is mentioned that “the challenge of this study . . . pertains to the cluster of metaphors” (1), which implies proper analysis of metaphors. There will also be some reflection on “its [ingestion language] rhetorical function” (3). On page 5 it is stated: “The theoretical approach that is used in this study is situated within the larger framework of literary and,

more specifically, narrative criticism.” It is then argued that figurative language (inter alia metaphors) is part of narrative criticism (6). A description of what is to be understood under analysis of metaphors (tenors, vehicles, etc.) is the given, also distinguishing metaphors from signs and explaining the characteristics of an effective motif (following Freedman).

The techniques of analyzing both metaphors and narratives are methodologically refined and well developed as part of literary theory in general. Technically their respective treatments are well described. In the case of metaphors, terms such as *tenor*, *vehicle*, *focus or frame*, *incongruency*, *interaction*, *substitution*, and so forth describe what should be done. Narrative criticism also brings its fair share of technical expertise to the table, presented in terms such as *plot*, *ideology*, *point of view*, *space*, *time*, *implicit author* or *reader*, and so on. Because these methods are technically so well developed, there are also many refined nuances and differences of opinion.

In *Ingesting Jesus* the expectation is created in the introduction, where the methodology (or rules) of this study is described and laid down, that the texts will be analyzed at least narrative- as well as metaphor-critically. This is where the disappointment with this study starts. Neither proper narrative analysis nor metaphor analysis is found in the rest of the study (apart from the names dropped in the introduction). To call a text a narrative and to “retell” it in one’s own words is not narrative criticism. The same applies to metaphors, which requires an even more technical treatment. “Tenor” and “vehicle” are described in the introduction but not used in the analysis of the text in any consistent way. Modern metaphor research also identifies networks of metaphors that could be established on the basis of certain literary phenomena. Ingesting language could, for instance, be such a network.

The methodological problem goes even further. No theory of linking different elements within the text is used (for instance, in the case of the Lamb serious discussion exists on whether 1:29 can really be linked to the references in John 18 and 19); there are also questions about the way in which “semantic fields” are understood. Does “*consumed with zeal*” belong to the same semantic field as “*eating bread*.” If not, it should be indicated, and the different semantic fields should be plotted. It is not enough to say that it is the same motif (which could also be questioned). I think that if the bibliography included a wider spectrum of available material on these issues (assuming, of course, that these books were studied adequately) some of these problems could have been avoided.

In short, the study disappoints on the methodological level. The methodological framework of the study given in the introduction was not properly applied to the material

under scrutiny. It should be asked whether a study should be regarded as successful in such a case.

I have also asked myself why the role of meals and banquets in the ancient world was not considered. There exists a gold mine of information about the social and religious roles of meals, which has direct bearing on what is done in this study. Since metaphors are cultural phenomena, this social information is important for the semantics of metaphors.

As was previously noted, this book provides the reader with material on the different sections that were analyzed, which is useful. Some useful suggestions are also made on the importance of the motif of ingestion in this Gospel (using Freedman's categories). The shortfalls on the methodological level is, however, a pity.