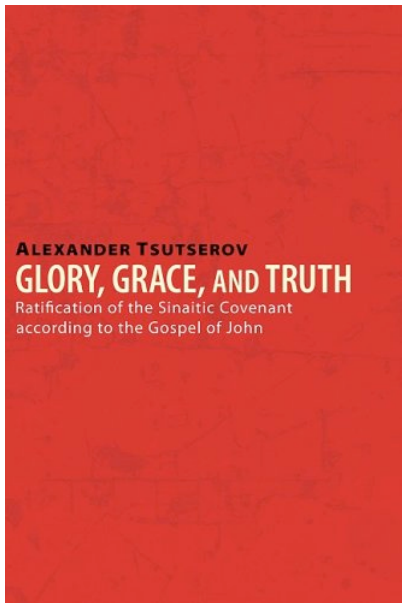


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Tsutserov, Alexander

Glory, Grace, and Truth: Ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant according to the Gospel of John

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“Glory,” “grace,” and “truth” are concepts central to the Fourth Gospel’s presentation of Jesus’ mission. These concepts are also helpful for understanding the Hebrew Bible’s various presentations of Israel’s covenant with YHWH. The present study focuses on the Johannine Prologue and, more narrowly, on 1:14–18 with a view to arguing that these three Johannine concepts echo themes from the exodus tradition and thus constitute a significant intertextual connection. Tsutserov’s main argument is that the Johannine phrases “full of grace and truth” (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας, 1:14) and “grace and truth” (ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀληθεία, 1:17) should be regarded as allusions to YHWH’s self-revelation in Exod 34:6. He argues that the Johannine phrases have specific reference to the phrase “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (וּרְבִּחֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת) but later concludes that the Evangelist translated the entire creedal formula in Exod 34:6 with these two phrases. Once Tsutserov establishes this connection, it leads to the further conclusion that the Johannine Prologue intends to present Jesus as a new Moses, ratifying a new, better, and more inclusive covenant.

In his introduction, Tsutserov begins by noting the three different terms used by scholars to discuss the “revelations of God at Sinai and as Jesus” (1): “replacement,” “fulfillment,” and “continuity.” After examining the secondary literature and interacting with the views

of several scholars, Tsutserov concludes that each term is insufficient on its own. Rather, future discussion should fuse the three terms and allow for an understanding of the two revelations as being “complexly related.” It is difficult to discern from Tsutserov’s language whether he is speaking of textual or existential realities when he refers to the “revelations of God.” To a certain degree this lack of clarity clouds the entire book. In some places it appears that Tsutserov regards his study as a historical-critical examination; in other places it seems to be an example of more recent attempts at theological interpretation of Scripture. The problem is that the author never makes his approach or assumptions clear to the reader. This is the book’s first weakness.

In chapter 1, “Allusions to Exodus 34:6,” Tsutserov meticulously examines the phrase “full of grace and truth,” attempting to marshal evidence for his view that the Greek phrase in the Fourth Gospel translates the Hebrew *ורב־חסד ואמת*. This discussion fails to be convincing for at least two reasons. First, the author adduces no examples where the Hebrew phrase appears in the Greek form he envisions. He examines the Septuagint, Old Greek, and the translations of Symmachus, Theodotion, and Aquila but fails to provide one example. This lack of evidence does not bode well for his thesis. Second, even where he demonstrates that a given Greek term can reasonably be used to translate the Hebrew, the occurrences are few and appear in literature with no intertextual or theological connection to the Fourth Gospel. In his conclusion to this chapter Tsutserov asks, “can the creedal *’emet* be translated with *aletheia*? Our study has demonstrated that that it *should*” (85, emphasis added). Notice that he does not argue that it *does* or that it *can* but that it *should*. It is difficult to regard such conclusions as anything other than special pleading for the author’s position.

Chapter 2, entitled “Terms of John 1:14–18,” begins with the author seeking to prove that *ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀληθεία* does not constitute a hendiadys, as many have contended. Instead, Tsutserov applies himself to the task of demonstrating that “grace” and “truth” represent two subjective qualities of God. After another brief survey of various secondary sources and Greek versions of the Old Testament, he concludes that hendiadys is not a feature of the Fourth Evangelist’s writing style. He comments, “Remarkably, scholars who are not driven by the desire to establish a particular theological point do not find hendiadys to be a feature of the style of the Evangelist at all” (127). This comment strikes the present reviewer as ironic for at least two reasons. First, the comment assumes, incorrectly, that there is such a thing as a theologically disinterested reading of any biblical text. Second, and more important, Tsutserov’s entire argument against hendiadys seems equally driven by a desire to establish a particular theological point—a point that has little evidence to support it.

In the third chapter Tsutserov sets out to demonstrate that ἡ χάρις, ἡ ἀληθεία, ἡ δόξα in John 1:14–18 allude to the wider unit, Exod 33:12–34:10 (LXX). This examination leads to his conclusion that “the terms *charis* and *aletheia* accordingly denote ‘graciousness’ and ‘integrity,’ two subjective qualities of the divine character (*doxa*)” (161).

Chapter 4, the shortest of the book, is dedicated to an exegesis of John 1:14–18. In chapter 5 Tsutserov makes the move from exegesis to theology, showing the theological implications that arise from his conclusions. Specifically, four aspects of God’s presence revealed at Sinai, all cognates of the term δόξα (viz., the visible appearance of YHWH [*doxa*], the intrinsic character of God [*doxa*], the miraculous splendor verifying God’s presence [*endoxa*], and the divine honor confirming God’s presence [*endoxasthesomai*]) are displayed in each of the seven signs of John’s Gospel (see 241). Thus, the ministry of the Johannine Jesus should be regarded as the ratification of Sinaitic covenant.

It is clear that the author has spent considerable time examining the secondary literature and the various versions of the Greek Old Testament. In addition, his knowledge of the biblical languages allows him to pursue research across a breadth of sources. However, his conclusions often stretch beyond the evidence he cites, and therefore his arguments are untenable. In some instances he argues that given translational options are possible even though they are not attested (as with his contention that πλήρης should be understood as a rendering of כָּרֵן, 163). In other instances he demonstrates that a Greek term translates the Hebrew, but these occurrences do not have the significance for Johannine research that he claims. For example, χάρις translates חַסֵּד, but only in Esther and Ben Sira, texts that are not traditionally associated with John’s use of Old Testament traditions.

In the end, the most glaring weakness of this book is not found in the failures listed above, although they are problematic and should be kept in mind. Rather, the greatest weakness of this book is the dismissive and condescending tone the author displays as he interacts with modern scholarship. Throughout the book, Tsutserov writes with utter assurance of his own position and consistently accuses highly regarded scholars of “fallacious reasoning,” “invalid argumentation,” “erroneous thinking,” and “contradictory” approaches to the issues he considers. In addition, he consistently writes of what his own study has “shown,” “established,” or “made clear” vis-à-vis his conversation partners. For this reason, it is often difficult to get beyond the author’s tone to the substance of his argument, which, for the reasons listed above, fails to be convincing.