

*The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6.* By Paul N. Anderson. WUNT 2/78. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996, xiv + 329 pp., n. p. paper.

This work is a revision of Anderson's doctoral thesis which he completed at the University of Glasgow under John Riches. Anderson's goal is to explore the christological tensions in John's gospel, using chapter 6 as his point of entry for the study. The first section of the dissertation is a survey of scholarship in which recent approaches to the christology of the fourth gospel are canvassed, significant commentaries are examined, and three different approaches (Kysar, Borgen, and Barrett) to John 6 are sketched in. What is evident in this section, and throughout the whole dissertation, is that Anderson is conversant with contemporary Johannine scholarship, and hence can conduct his study by interacting with scholars who have set the agenda for Johannine studies.

In the second part of the book, Anderson explores the unity and disunity of John 6, and the work of Rudolf Bultmann is the point of departure for his study. Anderson emphasizes throughout that Bultmann poses the right questions, even though his answers are unsatisfactory. Hence, contrary to Bultmann, Anderson argues for the stylistic and linguistic unity of John 6, for there is no stylistic evidence that enables us to distinguish between the signs source and the revelation discourses. Bultmann also argued for disunity interpretively, but Anderson rightly replies that John 6 makes sense as a whole in its context. He points out that Bultmann fails to see Johannine irony at crucial places in the narrative. The sign and discourse need not be torn apart in order to interpret the chapter accurately. Bultmann also believes that John 6:51-58 is a later redaction by

another writer because of the eucharistic theology contained therein. Anderson rightly contests again the interpretation proposed, contending that Bultmann reads the verses anachronistically, that the context flows naturally from the preceding verses, and that the verses fit theologically into the context. Anderson concludes, therefore, that the christological unity and disunity in John cannot be explained by external factors, such as different sources or various redactors. Instead the tensions in the gospel are due to the work of one writer.

Anderson's own contribution, then, is to suggest that the faith development model of Fowler and the transforming encounter view of Loder provide assistance in comprehending the Johannine message. Anderson takes the reader through the six stages of faith development in Fowler, arguing that the Johannine message is quite similar to what Fowler calls "conjunctive faith." In this stage a person rejects simplistic answers and realizes that life is more complex and disordered than previously realized. At this stage the ambiguities of life are embraced and included as part of one's worldview. The five steps involved in transforming encounters, as suggested by Loder, are also explained. Anderson argues that John's Gospel reflects fundamentally the subjective experience of a transforming encounter, so that the focus is not on the historical events that occurred. Anderson argues that Bultmann's view of dialectic is not far from the theories of Fowler and Loder. Anderson applies these theories by setting John over against Mark. In Mark miracles are acts of power that advance God's kingdom, while in John they are revelatory. He argues that the Johannine tradition is more complex and sophisticated than the Markan. The latter viewed Jesus as a worker of miracles, did not understand that miracles do not always happen, and chalked up the failure to see miracles to a lack of

faith. The fourth evangelist, on the other hand, has a much more complex understanding of miracles, realizing that they are pointers to something deeper. Three comments should be made about Anderson's work at this stage. First, the stages of Fowler and Loder can be helpful, but Anderson too easily superimposes them on the Fourth Gospel. Second, even more astonishing is his simplistic assessment of Mark's Gospel. He typecasts Mark as a kind of extreme charismatic gospel. I can only register here my disagreement, noting that many scholars argue that the miracles in Mark are pointers to something deeper. Indeed, the emphasis on suffering in the second half of Mark explodes Anderson's theory. Third, even though he criticizes either-or thinking, Anderson still seems to fall into it, portraying John as more interested in subjective experience than historical facticity.

The last section of Anderson's thesis explores John 6 in more detail, including a detailed exegesis of the text. He views John 6 as containing independent tradition, a view that is shared by most scholars today. John 6:25-66 is explained as an exhortation of two ways, so that one either eats of Jesus and lives or refuses to partake of him and perishes. Unfortunately, Anderson continues to argue that John is engaged in a polemic against Peter's simplistic miracle theology in Mark. I must also register another disagreement, for he misinterprets John to say that the manna in the wilderness was actually the agent of death, something that is not borne out by the text. For one who embraces Fowler's stages of faith Anderson, surprisingly, returns again to seeing a polarity between John and Peter. Petrine ecclesiology (Matt 16:17-19) is organizational and institutional, while John's view of the church is familial and relational. The Matthean account focuses on positions of privilege, whereas John sees ministry as service rooted in an encounter with Jesus. Anderson should have taken advantage of his own use of Fowler here, for he ignores the

emphasis on service in the Matthean tradition and the polemic against the selfish abuse of authority (Matt 20:20-28). Further, he engages in the kind of mirror reading that is utterly subjective in explaining John's Gospel, so that he sees the Gospel as being more tolerant and ambiguous christologically than 1 John. As with many intelligent scholars, he shows that he is creative, but being creative is not the same thing as being convincing. A flawed and subjective method leads to fallacious conclusions.

The problem with this study is that Anderson is not critical enough, in that he leaps to simplistic conclusions without carefully considering all the evidence. D. Moody Smith correctly assesses Anderson's work in the introduction when he says that author's work, though appearing to be conservative in some respects, is actually "bold and imaginative." Where Smith sees a virtue, I see a vice. I would put the emphasis on the word "imaginative," and speculative. Even though Anderson rightly critiques Bultmann, presents some good insights of his own, and rightly sees the unity of John 6, he does not advance our understanding of John's christology in a significant way. His own view falls prey to the kind of disjunctive thinking that he criticizes.

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