

# ○ IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL. REVIEW OF FRANSISCO LOZADA JR. AND TOM THATCHER, *NEW CURRENTS THROUGH JOHN: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE*

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This collection of articles on the John's gospel take as their common point of departure the 'milestone paper' by John A. T. Robinson named 'The New Look on the Fourth Gospel' delivered in 1957 and published in 1962. I must confess I had *never* heard of this study, but fortunately Tom Thatcher gives a thorough review of 'The New Look on the Fourth Gospel' in the first article: The New Current through John. The Old 'New Look' and the New Critical Orthodoxy. While Robinson's new look was focused on issues such as authorship, sources, historical setting, the new currents that run alongside these issues are distinguished by 'a chasm in consciousness' (p. 26) which shows itself in theoretical orientation and the participants in the academic arena. Thus significantly the new currents in this volume are claimed to be characterised by their methodological diversity and the diversity of global perspectives. After a brief description of the articles, I will discuss the volume's claims to globality and diversity.

## SURVEY OF THE ARTICLES

### PART 1: NEW CURRENTS THROUGH HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Jaime Clark-Soles, 'I will raise [Whom] up on the last day? Anthropology as a feature of Johannine Eschatology' is a very thorough article which discusses how John's anthropology reflects John's eschatology. This is approached by analysis of various anthropological terms such as *anthropos*, *pneuma*, *sarx*, *psyche*, *kardia*, *soma* and *koilia*. This leads Clark-Soles to construct a Johannine anthropology that blurs the distinction between present and future as does her interpretation of Johannine eschatology.

Carsten Claussen, 'The role of John 21: Discipleship in retrospect and redefinition' is as the title suggests about the (re) interpretation of Johannine discipleship in the last (and very contested) chapter of John. To sustain the argument one finds among other things a highly complex numerical interpretation of the 153 fish embedded in a reconstruction of the historical situation.

Mary L. Coloe, 'Sources in the Shadows: John 13 and the Johannine Community'. Mary Coloe is one of the more established Johannine scholars in this collection. In this article she takes us through the foot-washing as an anticipation of the crucifixion which functions as a threshold between the old temple and the new, which is the Johannine community. In this line she follows on from her book on the Johannine community as a new temple, or a new indwelling for the divine presence. To push it a little further it would be interesting to find a discussion on *what* is said in the foot-washing that *cannot* be said in the crucifixion? Why must it be said here?

Brian D. Johnson, 'Salvation is from the Jews: Judaism in the Gospel of John'. Johnson notes that John is highly dependant on Jewish themes in his in development of Jesus' identity and thus argues for a positive view of Judaism over against interpreters such as Louis Martyn. Johnson

interprets the use of the temple-theme, the Jewish titles and the Jewish feasts and reaches to the conclusions that we are talking about acceptance as well as rejection and that the use of Judaism to explain John's relationship has been one sided.

Beth M. Sheppard, 'Another Look: Johannine Subordinationist Christology and the Roman family'. This is a reading of John's portrayal of the son's shifting relationship to the father (sometimes equal sometimes subordinate) within Roman cultural patterns, a call to include Roman culture in New Testament studies as well as discussing the theoretical implications of this enterprise.

## **PART 2: THE NEW CURRENT OF READERS AND READINGS**

Armand Barus, 'John 2,12-25: A Narrative Reading'. The cleansing of the temple is here understood as pointing towards a community structure within which Jews and gentiles were united. Through an analysis of the characters in the pericope, Barus characterises John as both a missionary writing as well as a community. Here I would like to insert a comment on the excessive lack of engagement with other scholars. Barus has references to 4 scholars: Richard Baukham's article on Jesus in the temple from 1988, Shimon Bar-Efrat on *Narrative art in the Bible* from 2000, Bertil Gärtner's study of temple symbolism in the communities of Qumran and the New Testament from 1963 and Rudolf Schnackenburg's commentary on John from 1968. I find this a very meagre collection of background material on a theme that is so rich. The German tradition aside, which has some extensive work on the temple theme in John, there is also Mary Coloe's monograph from 2001 as well as Alan Kerr's study from 2002. On the literary techniques of the gospel, both Alan Culpepper and Adele Reinhartz have produced some valuable studies, which hardly can or should be ignored.

Matthew Kraus, 'New Jewish Directions in the study of the fourth Gospel'. Kraus's piece is a discussion of the works of 4 Jewish scholars (Samuel Sandmel, Daniel Boyarin, Paula Frederiksen and Adele Reinhartz) and an effort to combine and defend a notion of objective scholarship and Jewish identity. As an example of this position he takes us through a Jewish reading of the Nicodemus character. I still find it difficult to put my finger on what it is that bothers me about it, but I think it has something to do with his use of and obsessive distinction between objective and subjective scholarship as well as his representation of other scholars. I'll give you an example from his discussion of Adele Reinhartz's *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*:

In *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*, Adele Reinhartz notes that her involvement in feminist biblical studies led her 'to recognize that the scholarly objectivity I thought I could achieve by bracketing my Jewish identity was an illusion. I became aware of the degree to which my own work as well as that of other interpreters is affected in ways both explicit and implicit by our identities and allegiances' (2001: 14). Reinhartz adopts the position that confronting and engaging one's identity produces more objective scholarship because it exposes any ideological baggage that might burden one's reading of the evidence. (154)

Do you see what I mean? As I am not overly familiar with the work of Sandmel and Frederiksen, I cannot judge whether it is a fair representation of their labours, but in the cases of Boyarin and

Reinhartz it seems to me that he misses the point of their reflections and distorts the sophistication of their work.

Yak-hwee Tan, 'The Johannine Community: Caught in two worlds'. In many ways Tan's article sticks out. The most obvious one is the high degree of theoretical reflexion. Half the article is dedicated to discussing globalisation and postcolonialism, while the other half is a reading of John 15, 1-11 (the vine). Tan argues that her own hybrid identity (Chinese/Western, Confucian/Christian) has bearing on her understanding of the Johannine community as caught between two worlds, namely the world of the Roman Empire and the world of Jesus Christ. While the extensive amount of theory may seem overwhelming in comparison to the rest of the volume, it also points to the assumed knowledge of the reader, and so says plenty about the general field of Johannine studies.

### **PART 3: REFLECTION AND FORECAST**

Francisco Lozoda Jr., 'Social location and Johannine scholarship: Looking ahead'. This article is a comprehensive review of three works on John which use social location with various combinations of ethical, autobiographical, and liberationist criticism in their interpretation of John. Thus Jeffrey Staley is finally mentioned here for the first time, as is Alison Jasper. The last of the three is Adele Reinhartz, who is given more credit here for the sophisticated reflection in *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, than Kraus allows her in his article. Lozoda offers an engaging and open-minded review of their works and sees them as an important direction in Johannine scholarship.

R. Alan Culpepper, 'Looking Downstream: Where Will the New Currents Take Us?' Culpepper's article is, as the last piece, a summary of the articles in the collection as well as some thoughts on the shifts in Johannine scholarship. Finally he has been encouraged to point out some paths that future streams might follow.

### **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON NEW CURRENTS THROUGH JOHN: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

Since Culpepper may be seen as one of the instigators of a new line of Johannine studies with *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, I would like to take a quote from his contribution to *New Currents through John: A Global Perspective* as point of departure:

We may begin with the observation – confirmed by the diversity reflected in the contributors to this volume and the diversity of authors in the list of works cited – that the work of Johannine scholarship is now no longer being done primarily by white, Eurocentric males. (207)

With all due respect, I beg to differ.

I will not contest that there is Johannine scholarship not carried out by white Eurocentric males. The collection of authors and articles in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel Space and Power*, bears testimony to this. I am vehemently contesting the claim that this diversity is reflected in *New Currents Through John: A Global Perspective*.

A look at the list of contributors tells us about the 'diversity' of the authors in the collection. Of the 11 contributors, 7 are employed in the US, 1 in Australia, 1 in Indonesia, 1 in Singapore

and 1 in Germany. 10 out of these 11 received their doctorate degrees from English speaking universities (6 from the US, 2 from Scotland, 1 from England, 1 from Australia) and one from Germany. But how significant is this diversity if everyone thinks according to the same mould? What I mean is that being global is more than a question of nationality; it's an attitude, a position. Two contributors (Kraus and Tan) state their speaking positions, which seems to me to indicate that the global aspect is confused with universal. When most of the contributors speak from a universal position all the differences, which characterise global biblical studies, collapse.

Apart from this awareness of differences, doing global is also about *respecting* the differences.<sup>1</sup> Thus what Culpepper in another article has called *a hermeneutics of ethical accountability*<sup>2</sup> is somewhat lacking in for example Clark-Soles' reflections on gender and *anthropos* as well as Johnson's reversal of John's anti-Judaism.

The list of works cited does give the impression of diversity. Thus we have Gayatri C. Spivak, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and Leela Gandhi next to Moody Smith, Wayne Meeks, Louis Martyn and Raymond Brown. However, should one look more carefully as to which articles cite which scholars, then this diversity becomes extremely one sided. If one were to subtract Yak-hwee Tans article and its references from the collection, every single reference to Spivak, Hall, Bhabha and Ghandi as well as Foucault, Giddens, Said and Bakhtin would vanish. She is also the only one to engage with the work of Fernando Segovia, (apart from the single reference to the two edited volumes on John from SBL in Lozoda's article on social location and Johannine scholarship). A study that claims to be both Johannine and global can ill afford to bypass scholars like Segovia, Musa W. Dube, and Tat-Siong Benny Liew.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See the discussions in the *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* series, also by SBL Press.

<sup>2</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, 'The Gospel of John as a Document of Faith in a Pluralistic Culture' in *What is John? Volume I: Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, F. Segovia (ed.), The Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 3, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1996: 107–127, 127.