

Loader, William. *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. x + 532 pp. Softcover. USD 45.00.

William Loader is professor emeritus of New Testament at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia. He has written numerous books in the fields of New Testament and ancient Jewish and Christian sexuality. This volume is the update and expansion of an earlier book, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Structure and Issues*, rev ed., BBET 23 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992). The book is very well structured and organized, walking the reader through the Christological material in the fourth Gospel with an interesting and fruitful inductive approach.

After an introduction (1–37), the book is divided into two main parts, with three chapters in each part. The first part is on the structure of Johannine Christology (41–144), the second part (145–471) is on issues in Johannine Christology, followed by a conclusion (472–484), a bibliography (485–513), and indices (514–532).

In the first section of the book, Loader builds on the textual observations of Rudolf Bultmann, while seeking to avoid Bultmann's more speculative interpretations; such as demythologization and the dependence of the fourth Gospel on a "Gnostic-Redeemer myth" (3–4, 9–10). Loader agrees with Bultmann that the central feature of John's Christology is the Father sending the Son into the world as a revealer; to tell what he had seen and heard. But the Son never reveals heavenly words or events; He instead comes to reveal the Father (2–3). I believe that these foundational observations are solid.

In seeking the central structure of John's Christology, Loader avoids the "key text" approach of many of his predecessors. Instead, he adopts a more comprehensive method (45), noting recurring motifs and images in the Gospel, patterns of motifs and images, summary statements that contain those motifs and images, and discourses of Jesus about himself. This method leads Loader to identify three Christological summary passages: John 3:31–36; 8:12–19; and 12:44–50. The basic Christological framework that emerges from these "summary statements" confirms Bultmann's key observations. The central Christological structure (which Loader titles the redeemer-envoy pattern) can be summarized: The Father sends and authorizes the Son to come and make the Father known, after which the Son returns to the Father (based on 56–57). This structure is then confirmed in a section by section study of the Gospel (72–120).

Other parts of the Gospel, however, show a strong interest in the death of Jesus and his subsequent return to the Father (79, 83). The return of Jesus continues the revelation of the Father through the sending of the Spirit and the empowerment of the disciples (99, 106). Therefore, the full Christological structure of the gospel is the Father sending the Son to make the Father known, but also to return to the Father, commissioning the Spirit and the disciples to continue the revelation of the Father and build up the community of faith (121–144).

The second section of the book (145–471) addresses three scholarly issues of Johannine Christology on the basis of the structure which Loader identified in the first section. Loader addresses the role of Jesus's death in the structure of John's Christology (ch. 4, 145–281), John's soteriology in light of his Christology (ch. 5, 282–392), and the impact of John's Christology on the understanding of the book as a whole (ch. 6, 393–471).

The fourth chapter (145–281) explores the role of Jesus's death within the framework of the "redeemer/envoy motif." For Loader, the primary function of the cross in John is to make the Father known, not a basis for vicarious atonement (194–202). The cross, along with Jesus's life and "works," is the consummate revelation of God's love and character (202–213). But it is also the beginning of Jesus's glorification and exaltation, which are complete only upon his return to the heavenly realm (216–217). According to the fourth Gospel, the cross, the pathway of suffering, is the pathway to glory and exaltation (248). It is the first stage of Jesus's return to the Father, which results in the giving of the Spirit (20:22) and commissioning the disciples to complete the task of revelation (263, 266, 278–281).

Christology as revelation is a relational metaphor that fits well with John's doctrine of salvation (282–392). But it is not a revelation of the detailed secrets of the heavenly world; the words and actions of Jesus are a revelation of the Father (283–291). The fourth Gospel ultimately is not about Jesus, but about God (289). For the author of the fourth Gospel, salvation comes in response to this revelation. Accepting Jesus as the redeemer/envoy of the Father results in relationship with him and through him with the Father (295–302). The redeemer/envoy role of Jesus requires his pre-existence, full deity, and full humanity (293–392).

In the last chapter (393–471), Loader explores the relation of the fourth Gospel to history. Did the author believe he was writing an accurate report of the actual events of Jesus's ministry? Loader finds five different answers to that question in the literature (393–401). He believes, on the basis of the Gospel's own testimony, that its author is concerned about history, but it is history guided by the Holy Spirit, who has worked through the developing understanding of the church. It is history seen through the lens of time passed; selective, simplified, and centered on the author's Christological agenda. Thus, history in the fourth Gospel is creative, but a creativity guided by the Spirit and shaped by the community's tradition (402–421). The ultimate purpose of John's Gospel was to show the community that the life that Jesus brought with him as the redeemer/envoy was just as present after Jesus's ascension as it was in Jesus's direct ministry on earth. The ministry of the Spirit and the testimony of the disciples bring revelation and life to the community (421–460).

The main insights in the book are convincing, but a few things were missing in Loader's account. I fully agree that the central message of the fourth Gospel's Christology is Jesus as the revelation of the Father. But I am a little surprised that a reader unfamiliar with the Gospel might come away from the book without a full exposure to John 14:9—"If you have seen me you have seen the Father." Nowhere else in the Gospel is the redeemer/envoy model so

directly stated. But while Loader offers hundreds of passages laid out in Greek and English, this part of John 14 is only referenced in passing five times and the specific words only quoted once (345). Even there, the statement is not emphasized. Puzzling.

Loader rightly declares that the purpose of the Gospel was to show the Johannine community that the life that Jesus brought as the redeemer/envoy was even more present after Jesus's ascension through the ministry of the Spirit and the disciples. However, I think his case would have been even stronger had he taken note of the work of Paul Minear on the Johannine community as a second generation ("The Audience of the Fourth Evangelist," in *Interpreting the Gospels*, ed. James Luther Mays [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], 247–264; reference also my commentary, *John: Jesus Gives Life to a New Generation*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995]). The fourth Gospel is the only one that clearly distinguishes the first generation (Jesus's disciples and those who knew them) from the second (those who have no living witness to the earthly Christ) in the Gospel's audience. The analogy of the vine (John 15:1–7) and the prayer of chapter 17 (especially v. 20) are examples of this.

He also seems not to have noticed that the miracles of Jesus in the Gospel are all done at a distance. Jesus never touches the water that became wine (2:1–11). The royal official's son is healed at a distance of sixteen miles from Jesus (4:46–54). The blind man at the Pool of Siloam is healed at a distance of more than a kilometer. Jesus does not touch either the paralytic or the corpse of Lazarus (5:1–15; 11:40–45). The miracles of Jesus in John are performed by word rather than by touch. The message to the second generation was that Jesus's word is as good as his presence. Jesus is replaced on earth by the Spirit and by Jesus's disciples. The fourth Gospel itself continues the ministry of both to a new generation (John 20:30–31).

While any work of this length will leave itself open to criticism, my primary reaction is one of gratitude and appreciation. Having written a commentary on the fourth Gospel myself, I believe the more one knows about the Greek text of John, the more one will appreciate Loader's book. Even where one might disagree with his conclusions, there is much value in his textual argumentation. Anyone interested in a deep understanding of the New Testament in general and the Fourth Gospel in particular will find this book indispensable.

Loma Linda University
Loma Linda, California

JON PAULIEN

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Jason Maston teaches New Testament and Theology at Houston Baptist University, Houston, TX. He has co-edited several books on reading the NT in the context of second-temple Judaism, and is currently researching Paul's