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Welck, Christian.

Erzählte Zeichen: Die Wundergeschichten des Johannesevangeliums literarisch untersucht. Mit einem Ausblick auf Joh 21

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Andreas J. Köstenberger
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, IL 60015

Originally completed in 1991/92 under A. Lindemann, this slightly revised dissertation contends, contra Bultmann, that John's miracle stories were not incorporated from a "σημεῖα-source" but rather constitute an integral part of the Gospel. The author argues that the miracle stories, as "narrated signs," occupy a pivotal role in the Fourth Gospel, analogous to Jesus' miracles ("signs") during his earthly ministry. After an extended section on preliminary methodological considerations, Welck introduces his major categories before providing a detailed analysis of all the Johannine miracle stories. He concludes with sections on these stories' content, form, and function, a discussion of their role as σημεῖα for the reader, and an excursus on the nature of John 21. Focusing on the final text of John's Gospel, Welck uses a narrative method, rejecting source criticism in favor of a modified form-critical approach.

Since Bultmann, many have considered the Johannine miracle stories to be the result of the evangelist's redaction of a written tradition of miracle stories (the "σημεῖα-source"). Bultmann himself believed that the fourth evangelist sought to overcome a massive miracle Christology in the original document by a more symbolic understanding of Jesus' works. Other major monographs on the subject provided varying evaluations of this hypothesis: W. Wilkens (1969) was confident that the σημεῖα -source could be reconstructed; R. Fortna (1970) actually attempted a detailed reconstruction; W. Nicol (1972) was more skeptical regarding the possibility of delineating such a source; and W. J. Bittner (1987) rejected Bultmann's theory altogether owing to the style-critical work by E. Schweizer and E. Ruckstuhl.

Welck, concurring with Bittner, detects several inconsistencies in Bultmann's rationale for such a source. He notes that the latter did not succeed in resolving issues such as why only the Gospel's first two "signs" are numbered, and he questions the reasonableness of the assumption that the redactor himself was unaware of his own "inconsistencies," such

as the references to intervening signs in 2:23 and 3:2. Welck also criticizes the assumption of "aporiae" underlying Fortna's work, formal or material inconsistencies that allegedly betray the redactional work of the evangelist.

Welck's own form-critical work leads him to believe that the Johannine miracle stories are an integral part of the Gospel. According to Welck, these stories uniquely combine the genres of historical narrative (*Bericht*) and apocalyptic (*Offenbarungsrede*). This combination was necessitated by the author's desire to portray the eschatological dimension of Jesus' historical miracles, so that content led to the creation of appropriate form. Welck detects in the Johannine miracle stories a movement from a person's need to the narration of the actual miracle to the assertion that the need has been met through the miracle to a depiction of reactions to the miracle. But departures from this pattern are frequent, a fact that is attributed by Welck to the author's deliberate attempt to provoke his readers to believe in Jesus' provision of eschatological salvation (p. 253).

Generally, Welck's focus on the final text of the Fourth Gospel is commendable, as is his treatment of the fourth evangelist as a coherent writer both in terms of theological thought and literary formulation. Welck rightly sees John's "signs" as limited to chapters 1-12, with the signs of chapters 5-11 being characterized by mounting conflict and the raising of Lazarus constituting the seventh climactic sign. Also, he correctly draws attention to the strong positive connection between narrated signs and believing in 20:30-31 (p. 309). Welck's desire to understand the so-called Johannine "aporiae" from the standpoint of the final author's conscious narrative strategy, likewise, represents a step in the right direction. Moreover, this monograph provides a plethora of insights regarding John's narrative art displayed in the Johannine miracle stories.

One of the central theses of Welck's work is his contention that the Johannine "signs" are not merely miracles performed by Jesus during his earthly ministry but also literary entities designed to elicit faith in the Gospel's readers. In support for this thesis, the author appeals to the statement in 20:30-31 with its reference to certain written (*γέγραπτα*) signs. But Welck's claim that John's miracle stories *themselves* are signs is hardly convincing, since this passage merely appears to indicate that the Gospel functions as the written testimony *to* Jesus' signs. Welck is correct, however, in drawing attention to the fact that the role of the miracle stories contained in the Fourth Gospel is analogous to that of Jesus' miracles during his earthly ministry: they confront people with Jesus as the bringer of eschatological salvation and challenge them to faith in Jesus as Messiah. This christological dimension renders the miracle stories uniquely suited to evoke faith even in subsequent generations.

The author categorically sets aside historical considerations, limiting his comments almost exclusively to literary phenomena. But in light of his frequent reference to the significance of a given miracle story for John's *readers*, it strikes one as curious that

Welck displays virtually no interest in the historical identity of the Gospel's original audience! Also, in his efforts to shift grounds from historical to literary considerations, Welck at times seems to contradict himself, such as when he claims that 21:24a should not be understood as a historical statement, indeed, that the identity of the Gospel's author can *principally* not be determined by way of historical considerations, while at the same time affirming that one of Jesus' first disciples wrote the Gospel (p. 318, n. 11) and that the Fourth Gospel is presented as a first-hand testimony to Jesus' ministry from the hand of the disciple closest to him (p. 319).

Moreover, owing to his preoccupation with literary concerns, Welck fails to give adequate attention to important background issues such as contemporary Jewish Messianic expectations or the salvation-historical framework underlying John (on which see recently J. W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People*). While the author briefly notes that Jesus' σημεῖα stand in the tradition of the great, powerful deeds of God in the history of Israel, this remains an isolated observation that is not given the attention it deserves on a broader thematic and programmatic level. Welck also fails to address the issue of what constitutes Johannine "signs," merely equating these with Jesus' miracles. But John's emphasis on the symbolic aspect of Jesus' deeds leaves room for the possibility that John conceives of Jesus' σημεῖα as startling, even amazing, but not necessarily "miraculous" public acts of Jesus. Welck's determination of specific miracle stories, likewise, is subject to debate. Apart from the generally acknowledged six signs narrated in John's Gospel, the author, somewhat tentatively, includes Jesus walking on the water among the Fourth Gospel's σημεῖα. Since the latter, however, unlike the six commonly recognized signs, does not constitute a public act of Jesus, and since this event is nowhere in John explicitly identified as a sign, this classification is debatable.

Despite these criticisms, Welck's work represents a formidable effort to come to terms with the Johannine "signs" concept, and one that is in many ways more persuasive than that of his more renowned predecessors. While the discussion at times gets lost in the intricacies of details only marginal to the larger contours of Welck's thesis, the reading of this monograph will pay significant dividends to those who are not deterred by the bulk of material amassed by the author and by the occasional intransigence of his argument.