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Ferreira, Johan

Johannine Ecclesiology

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The result of the author's doctoral research at the University of Queensland, this book focuses on Jesus' prayer in John 17. A survey of methodology and the history of research is followed by two chapters each on John 17 (structure and exegesis) and broader Johannine concepts (glory and sending), and a brief conclusion. The book's two major theses are, first, that ecclesiology is a major theme in the Fourth Gospel, and second, that John's ecclesiology is closely linked to his Christology. However, since it is commonly acknowledged that Christology is central in John, the latter thesis is hardly groundbreaking.

Although there is room for a thorough treatment of Johannine thought on the believing community, Ferreira's work hardly qualifies as such. The general tenor of his volume rarely rises above that of basic survey; only in the chapters on glory and sending does he provide more in-depth discussion (though it is unclear why glory and sending are singled out for fuller treatment and not, say, love or unity, which likewise feature prominently in John 17). At the outset, the author provides inadequate justification for limiting the scope of his work to John 17. The title "Johannine ecclesiology" suggests a comprehensive treatment, especially in the absence of a delimiting subtitle. Would it be merely "interesting" to look at chapters such as 10 or 15 to assess their contribution to Johannine ecclesiology (as the author remarks on p. 204), or is this essential given the book's title?

In terms of larger issues, the author frequently appears to take over the findings of others rather uncritically. One case in point is his postulation of "a mingling of different

sources and several layers of redaction in the Gospel" (p. 19), including a signs source (p. 21). Another instance is his virtually unqualified endorsement of the "Johannine community hypothesis" à la J. L. Martyn (pp. 28-32). This may have been more defensible a decade ago when this theory reigned almost supreme. The last few years, however, have seen significant challenges to such a view (e.g. M. Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage*, WUNT 67 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1993]). Thus the author's thesis that "John 17 may . . . be regarded as an apologia of the Johannine community for their existence" (p. 55) requires further substantiation. This is the case even more so since Ferreira's view that "John 17 particularly reflects the Johannine community's understanding of itself, and that the prayer is therefore crucial for understanding Johannine ecclesiology" (p. 78) effectively removes the consideration that John 17 may tell the reader something of Jesus' own vision for the life of the messianic community subsequent to his death and resurrection.

Lack of proper discernment is also apparent in the author's conclusion that John presents the believing community as "the *praesentia Christi*, or better, *Christus prolongatus*," and his contention that "there is no real distinction between the sending of Jesus and that of his community," so that "[t]he community's sending is *not only analogous* to that of the Son, but it *is indeed the same sending*" (p. 136; emphasis added). As I have argued in *Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998), this type of unqualified equation of the missions of Jesus and his followers unduly obliterates the distinction made by John between Jesus' unique role as the incarnate Word and a signs-working Messiah and believers' humble task of representing the message of Jesus the Messiah promising life and forgiveness in his name to unbelievers. Ferreira's view also seems to run counter to viewing the Gospel genre as *bios*, with a focus on the main character, Jesus, and the distinction made in the Fourth Gospel between John's own time and the past history of Jesus (*pace* the "misunderstanding theme" in John).

At times the author seems to be unaware of both older and recent Johannine scholarship, such as when he maintains that the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel was unquestioned until Baur's time (p. 18). However, this is demonstrably false, not only because of Bretschneider (1820) but also on account of vigorous debate between 1790-1810, if not before (see my essay "Fruhe Zweifel an der johanneischen Verfasserschaft des vierten Evangeliums in der modernen Interpretationsgeschichte," *European Journal of Theology* 5 [1996] 37-46). When Ferreira asserts that the "Gnostic idea of the descent-ascent of the Redeemer plays a key role in John" (p. 206), is it really possible to make this statement after a century of scholarship in which such ideas have been seriously called into question? And is the question of the alleged gnostic background to John's Gospel "arguably one of the most important questions that faces Johannine scholars today" (p. 23)? Indeed, in light of the explosion of work on John's Gospel over the last two decades, it is surprising that Ferreira on the same page refers to R. Kysar's 1975 survey of Johannine scholarship as "recent" and "contemporary."

Finally, in the one place where Ferreira is novel, his thesis is highly questionable, namely the contention that John 17 represents the Johannine community's request to God for justice (p. 55). It is hard to see where in John 17 Ferreira finds evidence to substantiate such a claim.

While there thus continues to be room for studies on Johannine ecclesiology, especially if endowed with a healthy dose of skepticism regarding unqualified versions of the "Johannine community hypothesis" and in careful comparison with other communities such as Qumran, Ferreira's efforts rarely rise above the level of basic survey and break little (if any) new ground in such a quest.