

# Survey of NT articles 1988 and 1989

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Of the writing of theological articles there seems no end! The following are just some that struck this reviewer's eye. First, two relating to NT Christology: in *JTS* 39 (1988), pp. 28-47, James Barr challenges a widely held opinion when he shows that "Abbā isn't "Daddy"; Abba is correctly translated by Mark and Paul as 'Father', being an adult word (though used by children as well). In *NovT* XXXI (89), pp. 125-141, Joel Marcus looks at 'Mark 14:61: "Are you the Messiah-Son-of-God?"', arguing that the double term is a 'claim to commensurability with God' (not simply a claim to Messiahship), hence the charge of blasphemy against Jesus.

The impact of E. P. Sanders' book *Jesus and Judaism* is evident in several articles. Sanders argued that the so-called cleansing of the temple of Jesus was not a cleansing, but an acted parable portraying the destruction of the temple and the end of the sacrificial system. This view is criticized by Craig A. Evans in *CBQ* 51 (1989), pp. 237-270, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction'; Evans suggests that there was plenty to cleanse in the temple, and says, 'I cannot help but wonder if in his attempt to portray Judaism in a more positive light, Sanders has not lost sight of the possibility that there were things which Jesus . . . strongly condemned.' Sanders makes a lot in his book of Jesus' relationship to sinners, arguing (among other things) that repentance was not important in Jesus' teaching. Bruce Chilton in *TynB* 39 (1988), pp. 1-18, 'Jesus and the Repentance of E. P. Sanders', takes him to task on this and other points.

Other interesting articles on the synoptic gospels include a major study by Chrys Caragounis on 'Kingdom of God, Son of man, and Jesus' Self-Understanding', *TynB* 40 (1989), pp. 3-23, 223-238, and an examination by Raymond Brown of 'The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42-47)', *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 233-245; Brown's reflections on Roman and Jewish burial practices and about Joseph of Arimathea's role in Jesus' burial are of considerable interest, even if some of his conclusions about the gospel traditions are unnecessarily sceptical.

Johannine studies have been dominated for some while by the approach of scholars such as J. L. Martyn and W. Meeks, who see John's gospel as having been written in the aftermath of the Council of Jamnia (about AD 85) when, it is suggested, the Christians were finally expelled from the synagogue. Meeks detects a defensive sectarianism in John's gospel, for example in John 3, where the Jewish teacher Nicodemus is portrayed as failing to understand the truth. W. C. Grese in his article "Unless One is Born Again": The Use of a Heavenly Journey in John 3', *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 677-693, questions this reading of John 3, seeing it rather as revealing 'how outsiders can become members of the community, able to understand the enigmatic message of the gospel'. This view would fit in with the undoubted missionary interest of the fourth gospel: compare 3:16 with 20:21. Charles H. Cosgrove in 'The Place where Jesus is: Allusions to Baptism and the Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel', *NTS* 35 (1989),

pp. 503-511, is cautious about the Jamnian theory – wisely, in view of John Robinson’s potent critique of the theory in *The Priority of John* – but agrees that the gospel was written against a background of sharp conflict between Jews and Christians, and argues that baptism and eucharist are referred to in John 3 (‘water and the Spirit’) and John 6 (‘flesh and blood’), because some people wanted to be secret disciples – like Nicodemus – and not to associate with the public worship of the church. This view may be reading too much into the texts, but it is good to be reminded that the sacraments had a bigger role in the early church – as an expression of faith not as a supplement to it – than they do in many modern churches: becoming a Christian was not just an inward decision, but also an outward confession (through baptism; cf. Rom. 10:9).

Another intriguing and almost persuasive recent article on John’s gospel and also the Johannine epistles is Martin C. De Boer’s ‘Jesus the Baptizer: 1 John 5:5-8 and the Gospel of John’, *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 87-106. The author takes a fresh look at the question of the secessionist party referred to in 1 John, and suggests that they believed that Jesus was a baptizer – in water and the Spirit – and that he was Son of God; but they failed to take seriously his death – ‘the blood’ – and their continuing need for cleansing from sin. Another article to note is Ruth Edwards’ ‘Χάρις ἀπὸ Χάριτας (John 1:16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue’, *JSNT* 32 (1988), pp. 3-15, in which the author persuasively argues for the translation ‘grace in place of grace’, showing that the author of John saw Moses in a positive light.

Paul’s attitude to the law is examined helpfully by K. Snodgrass in ‘Spheres of Influence. A possible solution to the problem of Paul and the Law’, *JSNT* 32 (1988), pp. 93-113. The law functions negatively in the sphere of sin, positively in the sphere of Christ and the Spirit. For another more general article on tensions in Paul’s thought see J. C. Beker’s ‘Paul’s Theology: Consistent or Inconsistent?’ in *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 364-377, arguing for coherence and contingency in Paul’s writings, for example in Romans. J. A. Ziesler in ‘The role of the tenth commandment in Romans 7’, *JSNT* 33 (1988), pp. 41-56, sees the prohibition ‘You shall not covet’ as the key to Paul’s argument about the law’s failure in Romans 7; whereas the non-Christian may keep other demands of the law perfectly, this ‘just requirement’ can only be done in the Spirit’s power. Thomas R. Schreiner, ‘The Abolition and Fulfilment of the Law in Paul’, *JSNT* 35 (1989), pp. 47-74, seeks to explain how Paul’s emphasis on Christian freedom from the law can be reconciled with his teaching on Christian fulfilment of the law. Perhaps the most helpful recent book on this subject is Stephen Westerholm’s excellent *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and his recent interpreters* (Eerdmans, 1988); Schreiner argues that Westerholm (in an earlier article) underestimates the importance of commandments for Paul, and claims that Paul understands freedom from the law as (a) liberation from the Mosaic covenant with its particularly Jewish rituals that divide Jew and Gentile, and (b) liberation from the power of sin which used the OT law as a bridgehead. Schreiner argues for the formerly fashionable but now unfashionable view that Paul distinguishes between the ritual and moral law, the latter having continuing validity for Christians.

Paul’s attitude to women continues to worry scholars. J. Murphy O’Connor writes on ‘1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once

Again’ in *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 265-274, and reiterates his view that *kephalē* (1 Cor. 11:3) means ‘source’ (not ‘head’ in the sense of authority) and that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 is talking about length of hair (not veils or hats) – in opposition to men who were growing their hair long. However, O’Connor’s view of *kephalē*, which has been widely endorsed by other scholars, is seriously questioned by the notable Joseph Fitzmyer, who argues on the basis of Greek usage in the Septuagint (e.g. Is. 7:8-9), Philo and Josephus that ‘a Hellenistic Jewish writer such as Paul of Tarsus could well have intended that *Κεφαλή* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 be understood as “head” in the sense of authority or supremacy over someone else’. (Another recent article by Professor Fitzmyer is a reconstructed Aramaic original of Philippians 2:6-11, offered in *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 470-483.) Paul Barnett in ‘Wives and Women’s Ministry (1 Timothy 2:11-15)’, *EQ* LXI (1989), pp. 225-237, says that Paul’s putting of some limitations on women’s ministry is not because he considers women incapable of the offices concerned, but because of his concern about ‘what effect this incumbency would have on marriages within the church and indeed on the value of the mothering role’. Also related to the Timothy passage is a computer-aided look at the verb *authentēō* by L. Wishire in *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 120-134.

NT ethics continues to attract attention. Reginald Fuller looks at ‘The Decalogue in the New Testament’ in an edition of *Interpretation* devoted to the Decalogue (XLIII (1989), pp. 243-256), and comments: ‘In the permissive society of today, a society in which vice is so often paraded as virtue and where the sense of moral obligation is feeble, it is time for the church to bring back the Decalogue into its liturgy and catechesis’. Pauline ethics in particular are discussed by Michael Parsons, ‘Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul’s Writing’ (*EQ* LX, 1988, pp. 99-127), and J. F. Kilner, ‘A Pauline Approach to Ethical Decision-Making’, *Int* XLIII (1989), pp. 366-379; Kilner speaks of Pauline ethics being ‘God-centred, reality-bounded, and love-impelled’. The divorce issue is touched on by M. N. A. Bockmuehl in ‘Matthew 5:32; 19:9 in the light of pre-rabbinic halakhah’, *NTS* 35 (1989), pp. 291-295; he makes the ingenious suggestion that the Matthean ‘except’ phrases were added to stop anyone arguing that Jesus’ teaching about the indissoluble nature of marriage meant that immorality could not harm the marriage relationship. Still on sexual ethics, D. F. Wright’s ‘Homosexuality: The Relevance of the Bible’, *EQ* LXI (1989), pp. 291-300, criticizes those who have tried to mute the Bible’s condemnation of homosexual acts; on Paul he comments, ‘I find it quite inconceivable . . . that he could have countenanced any model of same-sex genital relationship’.

We could go on and on – to mention Richard Bauckham’s attempt in his ‘Pseudo-Apostolic Letters’, *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 469-494, to derive criteria from Jewish and post-apostolic pseudonymous works which will help us to consider supposed NT pseudepigrapha, or Ralph Martin’s return to the subject of ‘Patterns of Worship in New Testament Churches’ in a volume of *JSNT* dedicated to the Sheffield scholar David Hill (37 (1989), pp. 59-85), or the whole issue of *Interpretation* (vol. XLVIII/2) devoted to evangelical hermeneutics, including an article entitled ‘All Israel will be saved’ on Christians and Jews by Donald Bloesch. But, leaving many good things unmentioned, we must conclude.