

There is no exegetical consensus on the notoriously difficult passage in 3:18-22. After expounding four main lines of interpretation, A. opts for one that, in line with some Enochian traditions, sees Christ during his ascension announcing final condemnation to the angels imprisoned at the time of Noah. Salvation, therefore, is not offered to the dead; rather, the victory of Christ is pronounced over all hostile spiritual forces. In 1 Pet 4:8, in line with Prov 10:12; Matt 18:21-22; 1 Cor 13:4-7, sins are most probably "covered" when the one who loves pays no attention to the evil done by another to himself or herself, or to the community.

There are many reasons to recommend A.'s commentary. The work is up to date. It has huge bibliographies. Summaries of other opinions are ungrudgingly given. The copious notes on other parts of Scripture and on the classical world in general provide an education in themselves. Judicious selections are made. The usual format of Hermeneia is clear and inviting. In short, in an encyclopedic treatise that never becomes boring, readers have access to a fundamental NT writing and enjoy a fascinating glance upon one corner of the ancient world. A. has accomplished no mean feat in putting a new spin upon material that has been rehashed *ad nauseam*.

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GEORGE AICHELE et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995). Pp. xvi + 398. \$35.

With the expansion of interpretive paradigms in biblical criticism and the proliferation of theoretical orientations and reading strategies within the various paradigms, a new genre of scholarly literature has come to the fore in recent years: the genre of general introductions to critical approaches in the discipline. Such introductions are by no means an entirely new phenomenon; indeed, it was in the distinguished series *Guides to Biblical Scholarship*, published by Fortress Press, that such efforts were launched in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the recent introductions reveal certain new, basic conventions of their own: (1) a variety of approaches—from approaches across different paradigms to approaches within paradigms—are explored in different chapters within the same volume; (2) a variety of authors, each a well-known practitioner of the approach in question, are brought together in an edited volume; (3) the analysis of the approach in question—which differs considerably from volume to volume—is perforce more limited in scope. Given the present state of the discipline, such introductions have become invaluable reference sources and teaching tools.

The Postmodern Bible is the most recent contribution to this growing corpus of literature. Although it follows the basic conventions of the genre, the volume is also unique in two significant ways. First, while it is a collection of the work of several authors (ten in all) in an edited volume (four of the ten are designated as editors on the title page), there is also a claim of coauthorship on the part of all involved, as their self-representation ("collective") readily attests. Second, while it is a survey of critical developments, there is a further claim that behind the enterprise as a whole there is

an explicit common perspective, as a word in the title (“postmodernist”) clearly indicates. As such, the volume emerges as a quite well-focused and integrated volume that is far more than a collection of studies. It is an excellent piece of work, in many ways the best of the lot, for the following reasons.

First, there is ample—though not comprehensive—coverage of the contemporary critical scene. After a beginning chapter in which the rationale, purpose, and perspective of the project are explained, seven chapters follow, each focusing on a particular line of approach: reader response, structuralism and narratology, post-structuralism, rhetoric, psychoanalysis, feminism and womanism, and ideology. The focus on literary and ideological criticism is evident.

Second, the approach adopted by the authors-as-collective is quite open, refreshing, and consistent throughout. In direct contrast to traditional criticism, which failed to be seen as a theoretical exercise with inevitable ramifications regarding both the role of the Bible in contemporary culture and the question of power relations in society, the postmodernist option adopted is focused precisely on such matters. The result is a transformed and transforming exercise of the discipline, with emphasis on multiplicity and diversity.

Third, the analysis of the different approaches in question is uniformly superior. It is well grounded; close attention is paid to major theoreticians of each approach. It is thorough; there is close study of major examples and exponents of each approach within biblical criticism. It is practical; particular texts are interpreted with each approach. It is open-ended; reflections are offered on the future of each approach.

Despite such unmatched strengths, the volume does have a number of salient weaknesses as well. First, because of its concentration on the literary and ideological paradigms it almost entirely passes over critical developments in the social or cultural paradigm. Consequently, the analysis of the contemporary critical scene found in it is rather skewed, especially since the omission of anthropological, economic, and sociological approaches is neither explained nor justified. Even if one granted that no postmodernist optic is yet to be found in such a line of approach, a chapter concerning such developments would have been very much in order.

Second, while the submersion of individual voices in favor of a “collective” voice is properly explained, such an option does raise a number of problems. At a basic level, it affects overall style: while it promotes coherence and integration, it also engenders inconsistency and unevenness. Thus, not only between chapters but also within chapters some parts read quite well, are smooth and flowing, clear, and to the point, while others prove unmanageable, are difficult to follow, wordy, and convoluted. At a more profound level, it affects the tone and demeanor of the discussion as well. In the introduction there is reference to differences of opinion among the contributors, but such differences fail to surface in the volume. One voice speaks, with all seemingly in assent. Finally, at an ideological level, one has to wonder whether the desire for surface consensus does not in the end contradict the postmodernist *élan* embraced, which entails a vision of diversity and multiplicity. In fact, it is rather ironic that at a time when the marginalized are lifting their voices, the dominant are muting theirs.

The last comment brings me to a final and most important point. The group has chosen to call itself "The Bible and Culture Collective" and has gone out of its way—much to its credit—to address, even highlight, contributions of and from the margins. However, taking a cue from their own emphasis on power relations and transforming strategies, I cannot but pose the following questions: Within its own ranks, why did the "collective" not prove more inclusive of the culture of the United States? To be sure, it did include three women and two Catholics (both major advances), but why did it not consider it imperative to have other surnames and other faces represented? The result is not only a continued form of marginalization—textual but not personal representation—but also a further skewing of the material in favor of the Western discussion.

In sum, within the chosen parameters I find this to be an excellent introduction to contemporary biblical criticism—the best by far. At the same time, I also find the chosen parameters to be unnecessarily, even self-contradictorily, limited and limiting.

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PAUL N. ANDERSON, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (WUNT 2/78; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996). Pp. xiv + 329. Paper DM 128.

Focusing on John 6, Anderson probes significant tensions within Johannine christology: present and future eschatology, subordinationist and elevated christology, and ambivalence toward Jesus' "signs." Analysis of the literary style in John 6 and of its alleged contextual aporias and theological inconsistencies does not support Bultmann's diachronic solution to the problem of christological disunity in the chapter. Stylistically and linguistically, the chapter is uniform. Apparent lack of fit between questions and answers in the dialogue points not to editorial seams between source and redaction but to the author's extended use of the devices of irony and misunderstanding to instruct the reader. And 6:53-58 does not insist on sacramental participation to ensure salvation but does borrow eucharistic imagery to appeal for the community's solidarity with Jesus in his suffering and death.

Anderson attributes the apparent disunity in John's christological conceptions to the dialectical reflection of an early Christian thinker who had to reconcile the continuing tensions between belief and experience and who was confronted by a series of crises in the Johannine community, each requiring a quite different response. A. appeals to James Fowler's cognitive theory of faith development and James Loder's work on transformative experience to lend plausibility to this portrait of the fourth evangelist as a dialectical thinker who had achieved a "stage-five conjunctive faith" and therefore held a dynamic, tension-filled christology. John 6 does contain several layers, each stemming from a distinct phase of the community's history, but the voice speaking in each phase remains the evangelist's. John 6:1-40 reflects the author's



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