

BOOK REVIEW

Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ and the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). 652 pp. Pbk. US\$50.99.

Although there is great interest in scholarly circles regarding the Gospels, much of that interest seems to centre on the Synoptics. There seems to be a preference for the 'historical' Gospels as opposed to the 'spiritual' Gospel of John. Many would agree with the sentiments of N.T. Wright when he says, 'I think of John's Gospel the way I think of my wife, I love her but I do not understand her.' Despite this, there is a wealth of scholarly research on John that is just waiting to be made available to the public.

A new series called the Biblical Theology of the New Testament has just been launched and it is appropriate that the first volume deals with the theology of John's Gospel and Letters. Andreas Köstenberger, who is also the series editor, explains the purpose of the series in general and this volume in particular: '1) a survey of recent scholarship and the state of research, 2) a treatment of the relevant introductory issues, 3) a thematic commentary following the narrative flow of the document(s), 4) a treatment of important individual themes and 5) discussions of the relationship between a particular writing and the rest of the New Testament and the Bible' (p. 26).

Köstenberger divides this book into four parts. The first is the historical framework for Johannine theology. In this section, he deals with issues such as John's reputation as the 'spiritual' Gospel and the history of Johannine interpretation. All of the necessary introductory issues such as date, provenance, destination, occasion, purpose and authorship are dealt with. Köstenberger has an interesting dialogue with Richard Bauckham's claim that the Johannine literature was authored by John the Elder, in which Köstenberger concludes that the Gospel and Letters were written by John the Apostle.

The second part deals with the literary foundations for Johannine theology. One of the most interesting discussions in this part is the search for the genre of John's Gospel. Köstenberger compares John to both Jewish historiography and Greco-Roman biographies. He concludes that John's Gospel fits most closely with the historical narratives of the Old Testament, with aspects of Greco-Roman literature included for contextualization. Köstenberger completes the study of the literary foundations by a look at the literary and linguistic dimensions and a literary–theological reading of both John's Gospel and Letters.

The third and largest part of the book deals with the major themes in Johannine theology. Köstenberger begins with John's prologue in order to introduce major issues such as John's worldview and his use of Scripture. Köstenberger then goes to the end of the Gospel to deal with John's stated purpose for his Gospel. In this section, Köstenberger works through Jewish and Christian understandings of the Messiah. He then conducts a systematic overview of the entire Gospel, and concludes this part with a study of John's major themes, including John's love ethic, theology of the cross and Trinitarian mission theology.

The fourth and final part is a look at the theology of John and other New Testament voices. A very interesting part of this section is an overview of the rehabilitation of John's historical reliability in recent scholarship. The relationship of the Johannine literature to the Synoptic Gospels and Pauline literature is also dealt with.

A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters is a nice introduction to Johannine theology and is a helpful resource. However, there are some weaknesses. Köstenberger is so eager to rehabilitate John's reputation with regard to historical reliability that the book often takes an apologetic tone. For example, in dealing with the placement of the clearing of the Temple in John and the Synoptic Gospels, Köstenberger argues that there must have been two clearings of the Temple, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus' ministry. It is not necessary to reject a theological transposition of an event to maintain historical credibility. Köstenberger himself deals with the ending of John before dealing with the body of the Gospel because of the importance of John's stated purpose for the Gospel. Köstenberger's overview of the Gospel is also disappointing. After being treated to his rich treatment of themes and introductory issues, the reader finds his rather superficial treatment in his overview unfortunate. Also, this book could easily have been titled: *A Theology of John's Gospel*. The letters of John

receive very limited treatment. While this is understandable to an extent because of the difference in length and the narrative nature of the Gospel, the treatment of the letters comes across as a minor footnote. That is unfortunate, as 1 John in particular is a rich writing and a valuable source for New Testament theology.

Despite these weaknesses, this book makes a contribution to New Testament theology, especially in the area of Johannine studies. Köstenberger interacts with scholarship from the past and the present, giving the reader a good understanding of the relevant issues. The book is very logically set out and there is a good sense of the flow of the study. In some ways, the book is aimed at the undergraduate or beginning graduate student. However, there are enough references and notes to allow even the advanced student and scholar to use it as a valuable piece of research. Finally, the book is written in a clear style that keeps the reader's interest, even after being taken through dozens of different themes and hundreds of years of scholarship. Andreas Köstenberger's *Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* is a helpful resource that is an important addition to Johannine studies.

Stephen J. Bedard
Meaford, ON