

Book Reviews

Paul A. Rainbow. *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, The Epistles and The Apocalypse*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. Pp. 496.

In recent years, English-speaking scholarship has yielded an admirable harvest of expository reflection on the Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation of John. Within that harvest, those efforts to synthesize John's writings have typically confined themselves to the Gospel and the Letters. Paul A. Rainbow has now completed the first and "only English-language textbook on John's theology" that "comprehensive[ly]" seeks to incorporate the testimony of each of the five books attributed to the apostle (p. 9). Rainbow's acceptance of the Johannine authorship of each of these five books and defense of the fundamental historicity of the Fourth Gospel particularly commends his work to readers interested in a Johannine theology that aims to give all the exegetical data of these books their due.

Reasoning that "the Johannine universe is essentially personal," Rainbow purposely outlines his work around "personal entities" rather than topics or themes (pp. 31–30). The Father, the Father's self-revelation in the Son, and the Holy Spirit receive dedicated treatment, as do the "world" and believers (p. 32). To the degree that additional topics or themes surface in Rainbow's survey, they do so in relation to these divine and human figures that loom largely in John's writings.

For Rainbow, John's theology, while "christocentric," is "at its deepest level, theocentric" (p. 72). To say, however, that John's theology is theocentric in no way necessitates diminishing the central place that the person and work of Christ occupies in John's writings. This is so because the Father "becomes manifest in Jesus' acts," and "the Son of God came to draw people not to himself ultimately, but to his Father" (p. 75).

The first half of *Johannine Theology* addresses what John says about the Father (ch. 2); the person and work of the Son (chs. 4–5); and the “Spirit-Paraklete” (ch. 6). Curiously, the chapter on the world (ch. 3) follows the chapter on the Father and precedes the chapters on the Son. Likely Rainbow places this chapter where he does in order to set the Johannine context for the Son’s ministry (cf. p. 145). Even so, this placement disrupts the successive expositions of John’s teaching about the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The remainder of the book addresses believers in distinct lights. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss how a believer comes to Christ and abides in Christ, respectively. Chapter 9 gives attention to the believer in relation to the community of believers of which he is part. Chapter 10 addresses the believer in relation to the world of which he was once part. The church, while not “of the world” is nevertheless “in” the world and “for” the world.

Rainbow’s survey of John’s theology has a number of commendable features. *Johannine Theology* helpfully compiles and explains terms that are central to John’s writings. Examples include a discussion of the various “offices” or titles of Jesus in John (pp. 182–90), “propositions about God” in John (pp. 76–85), and recurring “terms” and phrases that John uses to describe the Christian life (pp. 323–38). Rainbow, furthermore, offers concise and exegetically-restrained readings of such difficult passages as John 7:37–39 (pp. 258 and passim) and John 14:12 (p. 411). His explanation of the meaning of “world” in John’s writings is balanced and nuanced. His description of the meaning of the verbs “believe,” “know,” and “love” in John is an invaluable entrée to the apostle’s conception of the Christian life (pp. 289–311).

Johannine Theology also accents aspects of John’s writings that surface elsewhere within the New Testament. One such topic is union with Christ. For John, “union with Christ ... is the relation in which all other gifts and graces of God are now available to human beings” (p. 274). Rainbow helpfully enumerates from John the distinct benefits that are the believer’s in Christ (pp. 274–86). Another such topic is the eschatological character of the salvation that Christ has won for his people. Rainbow persuasively responds to some critical scholars’ insistence that John’s realized eschatology has “displaced the end of the world” by surveying the wealth of data in John’s writings concerning the future (pp. 280–81). Further, Rainbow notes, what John describes as transpiring in the future is said to be “coming about ... in the present” (p. 281). John may therefore speak of “resurrection” as both already and not yet (John 5:24–29; 11:25–26).

An additional positive feature of *Johannine Theology* is its recognition and insistence that subsequent Christian theological reflection has been faithful

to John's writings. Rainbow unapologetically concludes that his own discussion of the person of Christ in John is but "a reaffirmation" of the Nicæan and Chalcedonian formulations (p. 182). This is so because "the Johannine data allow of no different conclusion today from those reached by the early church after long debate" (ibid.). Readers interested in an exegetical defense of the eternal generation of the Son (pp. 100–105) and a refutation of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (pp. 165–66) will find this book a helpful guide.

One way in which *Johannine Theology* could have been strengthened is by greater attention to Revelation. The outline and content of the book are weighted heavily toward the Fourth Gospel and, to a lesser degree, the Johannine Epistles. More than once, material from Revelation is introduced to corroborate a finding established from the Gospel (e.g., pp. 128–89, 284–85). The net effect of this approach is unintentionally to relegate Revelation to a position of secondary or tertiary importance in Rainbow's survey. One way to remedy this inequity is to develop, more than Rainbow has done, the Old Testament background to both the Gospel and the Revelation. Incorporating such findings into a theology of John would permit greater parity of treatment of both books. It would also provide an ideal avenue for illuminating the genuine affinities between the Gospel and Revelation.

Johannine Theology also raises but does not satisfactorily answer an important question posed by John's writings. Rainbow observes that, "in the Johannine corpus," the "world" is the object of God's saving action" (p. 139). Rainbow rightly affirms that John is not a universalist in the sense that every human being will be saved. This observation prompts Rainbow's further reflection upon "the scope of God's saving intent" with respect to the world (p. 141). For Rainbow, John "assumes the fact of the predestination of the elect but leaves its basis unexplained," even as he says that John has no corresponding doctrine of reprobation—only "human stubbornness explains the nonelection of the remainder" (pp. 288–89, cf. p. 142). Furthermore, if one gives "the cosmic passages ... their natural force," we will find that they "resist all attempts to reduce them to a limited divine saving intent" (p. 142). Neither "Augustinian monism" nor "Arminian dualism," Rainbow argues, can satisfactorily account for all these data. The best resolution he is able to offer is that John evidences affinities with both monism ("God's all-embracing sovereignty") and dualism ("a genuine contest between good and evil") without fully identifying with either (p. 144).

John's writings, however, admit of harmonization at this point. As Jesus's prayer in John 17 indicates, the elect are the eternal gift of the Father to the

Son (cf. Rev 13:8). At no point in the Gospel, the Letters, or Revelation, does John suggest that the decree of election is grounded upon anything seen or foreseen in the creature. John 15:16 and 1 John 4:19 point, in fact, in the opposite direction. Furthermore, to choose some is necessarily to pass by others. Upon these others, John stresses, “the wrath of God remains” (John 3:36). They are justly subject to God’s displeasure for their sin. God purposefully withholds from these sinners the light and life that are found in Christ alone (see John 12:40). It is within this Johannine framework that we must endeavor to explain what John says regarding God’s intentions towards the “world.”

Rainbow’s *Johannine Theology* is an admirable undertaking. Rainbow has demonstrated that John’s writings are coherent precisely at the point of their great concern—the Triune God and the work of salvation that he has purposed and accomplished and now applies in the lives of his people. Though more work surely remains to be done, we may be grateful for the many ways in which *Johannine Theology* helps us to become more attentive and faithful readers of the Beloved Disciple.

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Michael Bräutigam. *Union with Christ: Adolf Schlatter’s Relational Christology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015. Pp. xv + 240.

For a couple of generations now, stretching back to a study by Oxford’s Robert Morgan (*The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter* [Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, 1973]), a few primarily NT scholars have sought to call attention to the importance of the Swiss polymath Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) for biblical and theological studies. German theologian Werner Neuer provided a much-needed biographical foundation for Schlatter studies with a massive critical biography (*Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1996]). English speakers were able to access Neuer’s popular-level biography in a short work translated and published a year earlier (*Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Baker 1995]). Numerous German-language dissertations have been devoted to his hermeneutical and theological contribution in recent years. But until now there has been no sustained scholarly attention in English to Schlatter’s systematic-theological views as presented particularly in his *Das christliche Dogma* (2nd ed. 1923) and *Die christliche Ethik* (3rd ed. 1929), along with many other works in his corpus of some 450 publications.