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Rodney A. Whitacre, **Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology** (SBLDS 67; Chico: Scholars Press, 1982). 278 pp., \$13.00 (\$8.75 for members).

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This book is a photo-reproduction of a PhD dissertation successfully defended at Cambridge University. Whitacre follows the modern consensus in many critical areas: the author (or authors) is (are) unknown; it is unclear whether the same person(s) wrote the fourth gospel and the Johannine epistles; *apostynagogos* in John 9 is an unambiguous anachronism that gives a crucial clue to the nature of the gospel's *Sitz im Leben*, viz. conflict between Christians and their Jewish opponents; and so forth.

Whitacre's contribution is the delineation of that conflict. He argues that the author's (Whitacre rather tiresomely always writes 'author(s)', never 'author') opponents claimed to share many of the author's beliefs and traditions, but developed them into quite different thought structures about the nature and revelation of God. In both the gospel and the epistles, Whitacre argues, the author responds by appealing to the traditions he holds in common with his opponents, but also by showing the

differences. These discontinuities concern the place and purpose of Jesus: in the fourth gospel, the author insists Jesus is Messiah, God's Son and the supreme revelation of God, and especially of God's gracious love; while in 1 John the christological issue turns more sharply on Jesus' death. More important, the crucial criterion for assessing his opponents' positions and finding them deficient is his 'central theological vision of the love of God'; and the cardinal principle by which the author seeks to establish that his opponents are wrong is the appeal to the *continuity* of traditions as he understands them. The issues are so important to the author that he does not hesitate to class his opponents with those who are of the devil.

Whitacre's treatment of 1 John is more convincing than his handling of the fourth gospel. His wholesale adoption of many commonly held positions provides him with a platform on which to erect his own theory of conflict in the Johannine community; but one marvels at his willingness to adopt such positions without seriously wrestling with the problems they raise or checking the foundations again. Whitacre is to be commended for bringing to our attention John's stress on the *continuity* of tradition; but the more that point is accepted, the more difficult it must be to read off the life of John's community from the surface of the text.

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