

Jésus, Fils de l'homme et Fils de Dieu: Jean 2,23-3,36 et la double christologie johannique, by Pierre Létourneau. Recherches; nouvelle série 27. Montréal: Les Éditions Bellarmin; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1992. Pp. 476 (paper). \$39.95.

The thesis of this book, originally a doctoral dissertation at Laval University under Michel Roberge, is that in the Fourth Gospel the evangelist's thought develops around two fundamental christological schemas. The first perceives Jesus to be the son of man descending from heaven; the second affirms that he is the son of God sent by the Father. These two schemas provide the framework of understanding into which most of the other Johannine christological emphases comfortably fit.

After an introduction (pp. 9-27) in which he defends the primacy of structural analysis (understood rather more at a literary than at a theoretical-linguistic level), Létourneau offers four chapters, a general conclusion, and three appendixes. The first chapter (pp. 29-100) examines 1:19-4:54 in order to place the target passage, 2:23-3:36, within it. Competently interacting with many other proposals, Létourneau argues for a correspondence between 1:19-51 and 2:23-3:36 on the one hand, and between 2:1-22 and 4:1-54 on the other. It is the former pair that interests him, since it constitutes the fundamental christological section of the first four chapters, if not of the entire gospel. The themes of this "première tranche" provide us, in two chapters, with both the movement of thought and the essential content of the entire gospel: the testimony of the Baptist (1:19-34), access to Jesus by the first disciples (1:35-51), Jesus' self-disclosure by signs (2:23) and words (3:3-21), an exposition of the content of the true faith (3:13-18, 31-36), and the soteriological significance of the coming of Jesus (3:15, 16-18, 19-21, 36). At the same time, the movement of thought from one part to the other of this "tranche" constitutes a kind of advance warning to the reader of the argument of the book: we move from Jesus as messiah (chap. 1) to Jesus as son of man and "sent son" ("Fils-Envoyé") in chap. 3, corresponding to the movement of thought from the confession of Nathanael (1:49) to the confession of Thomas (20:28).

The second chapter (pp. 101-229) examines more closely the literary structure of 2:23-3:36. Létourneau perceives an important parallelism between 2:23-3:21 and 3:22-36. Why, then, this juxtaposition of the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus and of the Baptist's second testimony? Létourneau reminds us that the parallelism between John 1 and John 3 highlights the function of John the Baptist as the witness for Jesus before Israel. At the beginning of the Gospel, the Baptist's function is to introduce Jesus as the one who realizes the messianic expectations of the Jewish people.

Now, within John 3, the emphasis is refined. For the evangelist and for the Johannine community, Jesus completely transcends these expectations. On the one hand, Jesus himself is the sole competent revealer and agent of salvation; his alone is the job of disclosing the true nature of his person and mission — a task he undertakes within the exchange with Nicodemus. But the Baptist continues to serve as Jesus' witness before Israel. Juridically speaking, the Baptist had to be reintroduced to validate this testimony of Jesus. Létourneau is quick to point out that this does not mean Jesus *needs* the Baptist's witness or is dependent upon it (cf. 5:33–34). But John the Baptist serves as a critical witness in the judicial face-off between Jesus and the Jews.

Within the parallelism between 2:23–3:21 and 3:22–36, Létourneau perceives three further sets of parallels. In the first, there is questioning about who Jesus is, whether that questioning is generated by his signs (2:23–3:2) or by his baptizing activity (3:22–26). The second enlarges the perspective by situating the person or work of Jesus within the context of salvation that comes down from above — whether this is expressed in the new birth that comes from above (3:3–10) or in the insistence that one must be given to Jesus by heaven itself (3:27). Thus, the crowds and their questioning do not have the last word. In the third mini-parallel, we find the key to gaining access to this generation from above: it is the acceptance of Jesus' testimony, culminating in faith in Jesus as the son of man lifted up to heaven and as the son of God sent into the world (3:16–21; 3:28–36).

The third chapter (pp. 231–339) attempts to delineate, on the basis of the entire Fourth Gospel, the two christological themes that lie at the heart of Létourneau's thesis. The treatment of the christology of the "Sent One" traverses much of the usual territory: notes on ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω, comments on the Johannine mission theme, the commission and authority of the sender coupled with the obedience of the sent one (both in Jewish literature and in the Fourth Gospel), and the primary functions of this Christology. These are largely in the juridical arena and are largely tied to "son of God" language, which establishes Jesus as the perfect revealer of the Father. Similarly, the second part of the chapter treats "the christological schema of the son of man." It works through all the son of man passages in John and argues that the title refers to Jesus, understood to be a heavenly figure, descended from heaven, in the period before rising there again by his being "lifted up" by means of the cross. The functions of this "christological schema" are then probed. The title "son of God" could easily be misunderstood, so John uses "son of man," taking it over from the apocalyptic and Danielic strands of the synoptic tradition, in order to make it clear that Jesus is the perfect revealer not only because he perfectly obeys and reflects his Father's will ("son of God") but because he has himself descended from heaven ("son of man").

In the relatively short fourth chapter (pp. 341–70), Létourneau turns at last to the exegesis of John 2:23–3:36. In both parts of the primary parallelism of the text, the misunderstandings of the people are replaced and corrected by revelatory claims that turn on Jesus as the Sent-Son ("le Fils-Envoyé"), with salvific import.

The book ends with a general conclusion (pp. 370–78) and three appendixes (pp. 381–417), dealing, respectively, with the Johannine literary theme of misunderstanding, with tradition and redaction in John 3:1–21, and with the ἐγώ εἰμι formula in the Fourth Gospel.

Much of this discussion is stimulating, and there are numerous comments on Johannine themes and structures that invite pauses and ponderings. Much of the presenta-

tion is technically competent, though interaction with literature other than that in English and French is a little thin. The style is a trifle verbose; a good editor could have trimmed the book by a third, without loss of substance.

But my chief hesitations are three. First, the argument struck me, again and again, as too schematized. For instance, can “son of man” in John be so easily reduced to the patterns that Létourneau finds? Can they be so simply ascribed to reflection on the existing patterns of the synoptic tradition? Is John’s use of “son of man” offered primarily to strengthen the revelation theme in “son of God” that might otherwise be misinterpreted? And how much of such an analysis depends rather finely on inferring the evangelist’s unexpressed motives?

Second, Létourneau’s argument depends to a very great degree on the structures he finds. But if the experience of the last two or three decades has taught us anything, it is that competent and enduring exegesis should never be so dependent on just one method. There is little close grammatical exegesis, little reflection on reader-response criticism, little substantive interaction with the new literary criticism, and so forth. Of course, one thesis cannot do everything. Nevertheless, a reductionistic method, which might bring clarity of thought in one area, soon raises questions in several others, especially among readers who themselves have deployed a wide range of “tools” in their reading of the text.

Finally, “structure” for Létourneau primarily means parallelisms. Some of the ones he finds are more or less convincing; others are much less so. One of the features of this Gospel is that John tends to work with a relatively small number of themes that he recycles in various ways. That means it is theoretically possible to align quite a large number of disparate passages in John’s Gospel and find “parallelisms.” Pretty soon it becomes difficult to see where these perceived parallelisms are nothing less than well-conceived structures thoughtfully created by the evangelist, and where they are nothing more than the inevitable result of recycled themes. Are chapters 1 and 3 so very controlling? Most of the same themes, and more besides, can be picked out of, say, chapters 6 and 10.

I am left with the suspicion that this is a book with many valuable insights and an unproved thesis.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL 60015