

*Blood and Water: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus in John 18-21.* By JOHN PAUL HEIL. Pp. xii + 196. (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, 27.) Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Quarterly. 1995. ISBN 0915170264 \$9.

KNOWN for his narrative-critical reading on the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus in Matthew and Mark, Heil here turns

to the corresponding chapters of John with the same approach. As narrative-critical approaches vary considerably, Heil specifies what he means: 'Our narrative-critical approach proposes that the final scenes of the Fourth Gospel work together as a dynamic, interrelated progression, an "architecture in motion, assembled as it goes" [the quoted words are from R. Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989) 153]' (p. 2). Heil is not interested in the 'real, historical author', but only in the implied author 'who is a purely textual reality, the image of the author as projected by the text' (p. 1). Similarly, he is not interested in the historical readers but only in the implied readers. His aim is to display the narrative unity of these chapters, demonstrating how these scenes are arranged 'in several literary "sandwiches" or intercalations in which each successive scene is contrastingly framed or sandwiched by two other mutually related scenes. Each set thus operates as an alternation or "interchange" of contrasting scenes that involves the implied audience in an intense interplay of competing and/or complementary narrative themes' (p. 2). If he goes beyond other studies of these chapters, he says, it is in his attempt to produce 'a detailed narrative-critical treatment of the entire complex as an interrelated totality and unity' (p. 8).

Heil's monograph in large measure stands or falls on the structure he finds in these chapters, so it is worth reproducing his outline. He finds five sections in John 18-21. Each of the first four is made up of six alternating scenes that function together as a dynamic progression constituting four sandwiches. In the following outline, the scenes are spelled out, and then the same ground is covered again to identify the sandwiches. The fifth section has three scenes that constitute one sandwich. A separate coda concludes the fourth and fifth sections (20:30-31; 21:24-25).

### **I. 18:1-27: Jesus reveals his leadership to the Jewish leaders while Peter misunderstands and denies him**

#### *Six Scenes*

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| A <sup>1</sup> 18:1-9   | With his disciples Jesus reveals his identity to his opponents                   |
| B <sup>1</sup> 18:10-11 | Peter cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant                              |
| A <sup>2</sup> 18:12-14 | Jesus alone is led to the father-in-law of the high priest to die for the people |
| B <sup>2</sup> 18:15-18 | Peter denies Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest                           |
| A <sup>3</sup> 18:19-24 | Jesus confronts the high priest with his revelatory mission and is rejected      |

B<sup>3</sup> 18:25-27 Peter denies Jesus a second and third time before a servant of the high priest

*Four Sandwiches*

- (1) 18:1-14 A<sup>1</sup>(18:1-9)-B<sup>1</sup>(18:10-11)-A<sup>2</sup>(18:12-14)  
 (2) 18:10-18 B<sup>1</sup>(18:10-11)-A<sup>2</sup>(18:12-14)-B<sup>2</sup>(18:15-18)  
 (3) 18:12-24 A<sup>2</sup>(18:12-14)-B<sup>2</sup>(18:15-18)-A<sup>3</sup>(18:19-24)  
 (4) 18:15-27 B<sup>2</sup>(18:15-18)-A<sup>3</sup>(18:19-24)-B<sup>3</sup>(18:25-27)

**II. 18:28-19:11: Jesus is rejected by the Jews but reveals himself to Pilate**

*Six Scenes*

- A<sup>1</sup> 18:28-32 Outside the praetorium the Jews refuse Pilate's offer to judge Jesus themselves  
 B<sup>1</sup> 18:33-38a Inside Jesus reveals his kingship to Pilate  
 A<sup>2</sup> 18:38b-40 Outside the Jews reject Pilate's offer to release Jesus as their king  
 B<sup>2</sup> 19:1-3 Inside Pilate's soldiers mock Jesus' kingship  
 A<sup>3</sup> 19:4-7 Outside the Jews reject Pilate's offer of the innocent Jesus, God's Son  
 B<sup>3</sup> 19:8-11 Inside Jesus reveals his divine origin to Pilate

*Four Sandwiches*

- (1) 18:28-40 A<sup>1</sup>(18:28-32)-B<sup>1</sup>(18:33-38a)-A<sup>2</sup>(18:38b-40)  
 (2) 18:33-19:3 B<sup>1</sup>(18:33-38a)-A<sup>2</sup>(18:38b-40)-B<sup>2</sup>(19:1-3)  
 (3) 18:38b-19:7 A<sup>2</sup>(18:38b-40)-B<sup>2</sup>(19:1-3)-A<sup>3</sup>(19:4-7)  
 (4) 19:1-11 B<sup>2</sup>(19:1-3)-A<sup>3</sup>(19:4-7)-B<sup>3</sup>(19:8-11)

**III. 19:12-42: The revelatory death and burial of Jesus advances God's plan of salvation**

*Six Scenes*

- A<sup>1</sup> 19:12-22 Pilate invites the Jews to see and accept Jesus as king  
 B<sup>1</sup> 19:23-24 Roman soldiers take Jesus' clothing and fulfill Scripture  
 A<sup>2</sup> 19:25-27 Jesus invites the beloved disciple to see and accept his mother  
 B<sup>2</sup> 19:28-30 Jesus takes vinegar, dies, and completes Scripture  
 A<sup>3</sup> 19:31-37 Jesus' blood and water invite looking upon him  
 B<sup>3</sup> 19:38-42 Joseph and Nicodemus take the body of Jesus for Jewish burial

*Four Sandwiches*

- (1) 19:12-27 A<sup>1</sup>(19:12-22)-B<sup>1</sup>(19:23-24)-A<sup>2</sup>(19:25-27)  
 (2) 19:23-30 B<sup>1</sup>(19:23-24)-A<sup>2</sup>(19:25-27)-B<sup>2</sup>(19:28-30)  
 (3) 19:25-37 A<sup>2</sup>(19:25-27)-B<sup>2</sup>(19:28-30)-A<sup>3</sup>(19:31-37)  
 (4) 19:28-42 B<sup>2</sup>(19:28-30)-A<sup>3</sup>(19:31-37)-B<sup>3</sup>(19:38-42)

**IV. 20:1-31: The disciples see and come to believe in the risen Jesus***Six Scenes*

- A<sup>1</sup> 20:1-2 Mary Magdalene announces that Jesus was taken from the tomb  
 B<sup>1</sup> 20:3-10 Peter and the beloved disciple witness the burial cloths of the tomb of Jesus  
 A<sup>2</sup> 20:11-18 Mary Magdalene announces her vision of the risen Lord  
 B<sup>2</sup> 20:19-23 The disciples see the risen Lord and receive the Spirit  
 A<sup>3</sup> 20:24-25 Thomas announces his disbelief without seeing  
 B<sup>3</sup> 20:26-29 The disciples and Thomas see and believe in the risen Lord  
 C 20:30-31 What has been written is a basis for the faith of the audience

*Four Sandwiches*

- (1) 20:1-18 A<sup>1</sup>(20:1-2)-B<sup>1</sup>(20:3-10)-A<sup>2</sup>(20:11-18)  
 (2) 20:3-23 B<sup>1</sup>(20:3-10)-A<sup>2</sup>(20:11-18)-B<sup>2</sup>(20:19-23)  
 (3) 20:11-25 A<sup>2</sup>(20:11-18)-B<sup>2</sup>(20:19-23)-A<sup>3</sup>(20:24-25)  
 (4) 20:19-29 B<sup>2</sup>(20:19-23)-A<sup>3</sup>(20:24-25)-B<sup>3</sup>(20:26-29)  
 C(20:30-31)

**V. 21:1-25: The risen Jesus empowers Peter to nourish the disciples and follow him***Three Scenes*

- A<sup>1</sup> 21:1-14 The beloved disciple directs Peter to the risen Lord who feeds the disciples  
 B<sup>1</sup> 21:15-19a Jesus commissions Peter to feed the sheep  
 A<sup>2</sup> 21:19b-23 Peter and the beloved disciple follow the risen Lord  
 C 21:24-25 What has been written is a true witness for the faith of the audience

*One Sandwich*

- (1) 21:1-23 A<sup>1</sup>(21:1-14)-B<sup>1</sup>(21:15-19a)-A<sup>2</sup>(21:19b-23)  
 C(21:24-25)

The rest of the book is made up of a preliminary literary analysis of these five sections (pp. 7–15), a detailed treatment of each section with a chapter devoted to each (pp. 16–167), and a concluding chapter (pp. 168–71).

The work abounds in suggestive insights, usually in line with dominant trends in Johannine scholarship. Thus the death of Jesus is understood almost exclusively in revelatory categories (in line with Brown and Forestell, *contra* Schnackenburg); the disciples receive the Spirit in 20:19–23 (though on that reading, why is Thomas excluded, and why are the disciples so remarkably thick from there to the end of the book?). For the kind of study it is, Heil's book is relatively free of narrative-critical jargon.

My hesitations about the book fall into two categories. First, the pattern of sections, scenes, and intercalations strikes me as just too neat. The inside/outside pattern in §II is fair enough, and has often been noticed. But it is much harder to detect a similar pattern in §III: the contrast between 'inviting' and 'taking' strikes me as artificial. To make this doubtful pattern work, Heil lumps 19:12–22 together into one scene. He candidly admits, 'We have found no other interpreter who recognizes 19:12–22 as an integral scene unified by the theme of kingship' (p. 10 n. 13), and then provides a long list of interpreters who see a break at v. 16a. One suspects that the reason it is possible to dissent from the majority opinion and deny that there is a break at v. 16a is that John keeps recycling a relatively small number of themes, so that the links these themes make, precisely because of their frequent reiteration, can be configured in different ways. But to configure them in defiance of scene changes as dramatic as that between v. 16a and v. 16b is surely a warning signal to start wondering if a pattern is being imposed on the text. I have similar hesitations with parts of §IV and §V. In short, the most believable parts of Heil's structure are those that have been noticed before—though Heil works through the effects of intercalation better than I have seen elsewhere. But what is newest in the thesis is least convincing.

My second objection is of a more general nature. Isn't there something worrying about deploying a single literary tool on a complex document like John's Gospel while self-consciously and rigorously excluding considerations generated by other approaches? Of course, one book cannot do everything. But this sort of single-minded focus, doubtless designed to achieve maximum control by eliminating extraneous considerations, is surely *bound* to get things wrong. It doesn't much matter what the approach is: the same could be said about source-critical approaches, rhetorical approaches, history-of-religions

approaches, and so forth. For instance, narrow history-of-religions approaches habitually sink into what Samuel Sandmel used to call 'parallelomania', resulting in distorted exegesis as dubious parallels call the hermeneutical shots; but inattention to history-of-religions considerations is in danger of cutting a document off from its first-century milieu, thereby distorting the exegesis by a new route. Again, most source-critical approaches are so busily ferreting out aporias as evidence of seams that the fine narrative-critical instincts of a Heil are overlooked: there must be some effort to make sense of the book, including the structure of the book, as a whole. But on the other hand, the narrow focus on a narrative-critical reading, despite its valuable insights, finally leaves me with a sense of unreality. Consider, for instance, this part of Heil's conclusion:

In the fourth section (20:1-31) the audience moves through the theme of individuals encountering the evidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead (20:1-2, 11-18, 24-25). In continual contrast and development, the alternating scenes lead the reader through the theme of the group of disciples encountering the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus (20:3-10, 19-23, 26-29). A concluding scene presents the audience with the purpose of the narrative. The first theme confronts the reader with initial evidence ... (p. 170).

The interpretation of the passion and resurrection narratives can be worded this way only because narrative-critical methods have cut these chapters off from history and witness, from the rest of the Fourth Gospel, from ecclesiastical confession and rhetorical device, and so forth. Postmodern sensibilities notwithstanding, can we not find a way to focus on the contribution of one critical tool without simultaneously jettisoning all the rest?

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