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Smith, D. Moody.
The Theology of the Gospel of John

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Pp. xiv + 202, Cloth, \$44.95/\$12.95 (paper), ISBN 0521357764.

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In four gracefully written chapters, Smith covers an extraordinary range of material with the poise and balance for which he has become well known. The first chapter, a nine-page "Introduction," justifies the approach taken in the rest of the book. The second chapter (pp. 10-74) sets out the setting and sources of Johannine theology. After glancing judiciously at the worlds of Hellenism, Gnosticism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Jewish Wisdom motifs in order to establish that the vocabulary and concepts of the Fourth Gospel "find their place in the world of late Hellenistic and Jewish antiquity," Smith provides a running theological commentary on the entire Gospel (pp. 20-48) in order to uncover what is distinctive about the book before attempting closer analysis of its setting and sources. As for the former, Smith first examines the setting in Judaism, probing "the Jews" in John, comparing John, Paul, and Judaism, and taking a more or less common view of the "parting of the ways" (including a sympathetic reading of the thesis of J. Louis Martyn). The section on the setting of the Fourth Gospel within the NT and early Christianity finds Smith comparing the Gospel with the Johannine epistles (high correspondence), Revelation (little correspondence), the Synoptic Gospels (little evidence of literary dependence but more substantial agreement than some think), Pauline Christianity (Smith gently urges that John did not know of Paul's work), Hebrews (no dependence but marked similarity in their conceptions of supersession), the *Gospel of Truth* (very different writings but "somehow related in their conceptual world or milieu"), and the *Odes of Solomon* (a broad base of early Christian tradition shared by the two documents).

The third chapter (pp. 75-160) explores the themes of Johannine theology. Smith begins by articulating "certain inherited beliefs" that for John are "givens": beliefs about God, Scripture, Jesus, and "kerygma, church, and Spirit." The rest of the chapter is divided into two lengthy sections: "The Revelation of the Glory to the World," treating primarily christological matters and the question of how one comes to faith, as well as such themes as signs, death as glorification, and the role of the Baptist; and "The Revelation of the

Glory to the Community," focusing especially on the Spirit-Paraclete, the unity theme and the love commandment, eschatological life, prayer, ecclesiology, and sacraments.

In most instances, the *via media* for which Smith is renowned surfaces. For example, on the sacraments, Smith points out that it is difficult to believe that 6:52-58 could have been written with no thought of the Lord's Supper, "given the pervasiveness of the sacrament at an early date." But on the other hand, he also carefully notes that the words of institution have not been preserved in John 13. Moreover,

the allusive character of even this passage [viz. John 6:52-58] suggests that the author does not wish simply to say that partaking of the sacrament is the *sine qua non* of salvation. In the sacrament one partakes of the life that is in Jesus, and therefore one must partake. But to think that such ritual participation alone would guarantee salvation defies everything that is said about the necessity of the believer's faith and obedience in the farewell discourses and elsewhere (cf. 6:63).

Apart from the anachronistic usage of "sacrament," this is so evenhanded that scholars ranging from thoroughgoing sacramentalists to non-sacramentalists will not take great umbrage. At the same time, neither side will think Smith has it quite right. This is typical of both the strength and the weakness of the volume: it will please almost everyone as basically "sensible" and almost no one with respect to any particular party line or interpretive tradition.

Although the third chapter is probably the most useful for students (for whom the book is intended), the last chapter (pp. 161-82) is in some ways the most interesting for Johannine specialists. Here Smith treats three issues raised by Johannine theology: the nature of mythology ("raised by the heavily supernatural aspect of the christology of the Fourth Gospel"), anti-Semitism ("raised by the Gospel's negative view of the Jews who reject christology"), and the nature or character of Christianity ("raised by John's relationship to the rest of the New Testament and to the later creeds of the church"). Occasionally the categories are misleading. Does John's treatment of rebirth indicate that the concept of rebirth is being "demythologized" by the evangelist within the Gospel itself? Or is this a relatively simple metaphor (on which category see Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985])? But the treatment of anti-Semitism is especially careful, and the section on the nature of Christianity is generously synthetic in the best sense.

This is a useful book for students. Experts will learn little from it but will appreciate the review, not to mention the sagacity that marks every chapter. Occasionally one wonders about some organizational decision or other: why, for example, is Scripture treated as part of John's presuppositions but not as one of his sources? Inevitably many will wish

some things had been weighted differently. But this book admirably achieves the aims of the series and deserves a long life.