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**Anderson, Paul N.**

***The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John***

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Building upon his earlier work, well-known Johannine scholar Paul Anderson has produced an introductory textbook on the Fourth Gospel. Anderson writes in a clear, lucid style, making the book accessible to a broad range of readers. That alone, however, is not sufficient reason to recommend a book. There are many excellent introductions to the Fourth Gospel available, such as A. Köstenberger (*Encountering John*, 2002), R. Edwards (*Discovering John*, 2003), W. Carter (*John: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 2006), R. Kysar (*John the Maverick Gospel*, 2007), and J. van der Watt (*An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters*, 2008). So, one may ask whether there was a need to produce yet another one. I had two questions in mind before evaluating the book: How is this textbook distinct from others? What contribution does it make? The answers to these questions will determine the significance of the book.

After a short introduction, the book unfolds in three parts. Part 1 introduces the reader to the numerous riddles (i.e., perplexing issues) in the Fourth Gospel: theological riddles in chapter 2, historical riddles in chapter 3, and literary riddles in chapter 4. Although these chapters contain no surprises, Anderson neatly sets out for the reader the various categories of riddles. In part 2 Anderson reveals his strategy for addressing the Johannine riddles. He starts, in chapter 5, by outlining the strengths and weaknesses of various

scholarly approaches to the Fourth Gospel. Anderson positions himself along the perspectives of Alan Culpepper and Raymond Brown: “the Gospel of John is best interpreted as a literary narrative with its own claims to memory and interpretation of Jesus’ ministry, *whoever* its author might have been” (123). Chapter 6 is arguably the most important part of the book, for it is here that Anderson clarifies his approach to addressing the riddles of the Fourth Gospel. Anderson’s theory of so-called “dialogical autonomy of the Fourth Gospel” includes the following aspects. First, Anderson considers Mark and John the “Bi-Optic Gospels,” suggesting that, while John probably knew Mark, his Gospel also shows a radical independence from Mark’s account. Second, Anderson contends that the theological tensions in the Fourth Gospel are not the result of multiple sources and authors but of John’s dialectical approach to holding truths in tension, working in both-and ways instead of either-or ways. Third, Anderson explains his reconstruction of the Johannine community in three phases, including no less than seven crises over seven decades. Fourth, Anderson suggests a two-edition theory of composition for the Fourth Gospel—a basic first edition, by whoever the original author, as an intentional alternative to Mark around 80–85 C.E., and the final edition by John the Elder (who also wrote the Epistles) around 100 C.E. Fifth, Anderson considers aspects of interfluentiality (i.e., mutual influence) between John and the other traditions—Mark, Luke, Q, and Matthew—resulting in a complex diagram of interrelated oral and written traditions among the Gospels (151). Chapter 7 concludes part 2 by briefly exploring the origin and character of John’s theological, historical, and literary perplexities. After having outlined his theory, Anderson returns in part 3 to the Johannine riddles and shows how to interpret them by looking at the Christ of faith and Johannine theology (ch. 8), the Jesus of history in the Fourth Gospel (ch. 9), and aspects of the church (ch. 10). A brief conclusion ends the book.

I offer a few critical remarks, focusing mainly on chapter 6, the book’s fulcrum. In order to reconstruct the history of the Johannine situation, Anderson engages in a two-level reading of the Fourth Gospel where “what happened” during Jesus’ time correlates to “what was happening” during the various stages in the Johannine situation. Although this approach in its various shapes has been widely accepted since its introduction by Louis Martyn more than forty years ago, it has also been challenged recently by scholars such as Richard Bauckham (*The Gospels for All Christians* [Eerdmans, 1998]), Tobias Hägerland (*JSNT* 25 [2003]: 309–22), and Edward Klink (*The Sheep of the Fold* [Cambridge University Press, 2007]). Like many others, Anderson assumes (rather than argues) that such an approach is legitimate. Although Anderson briefly mentions Bauckham in chapter 5 and even concedes his proposal “a notable challenge,” there is no interaction (118). There is also no reference to Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Eerdmans, 2006), where a strong argument is made for the Beloved Disciple as the real

author of the Fourth Gospel. Instead, Anderson favors composition theories that sidestep the question of authorship. For example, Anderson contends that John the Elder finalized the first edition of the Fourth Gospel, adding chunks such as the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and signing it off as the witness of the Beloved Disciple (21:24) (143). However, 21:24 also tells us that this “disciple [the Beloved Disciple] ... has *written* these things.” Are “these things” simply everything minus the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21? Besides, although Anderson points out the aporia in 14:31, must we immediately claim that John 15–17 is thus a later edition? While I have no problem with a later editor being at work (e.g., in 7:53–8:11 and 21:24–25), it seems rather clumsy of the editor to leave in these three Greek words that translate “Get up, let’s go from here” in 14:31. Is it not equally plausible that Jesus and his disciples did get up and leave and that Jesus taught the material in John 15–17 en route to the garden in 18:1? Perhaps some of the riddles have easier solutions than Anderson assumes.

I return to the questions I first posed in order to deliver the final verdict on the book. I contend that this book is distinct from other textbooks in two ways. First, it has a unique approach in that it explores the riddles or tensions in the Fourth Gospel at the theological, historical, and literary levels. Second, Anderson is able to suggest a unique way forward, a particular perspective on the Fourth Gospel in order to resolve its riddles. The added value of the book is found in Anderson’s proposal to recognize the dialogical autonomy of the Fourth Gospel as a key to unlock its riddles. Whether or not one agrees with his reconstruction of the Johannine situation and some other issues, I think it is fair to say that Anderson has successfully produced a textbook on the Fourth Gospel that is both distinct and has added value. For this we can only applaud him.