



**Bauckham, Richard.**

*The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

## 1. Introduction

Richard Bauckham, ever the trendsetter that he is, sets out to break modern critical tradition in this collection of 12 essays that have been published previously by the good Dr. throughout his illustrious career. The opening words to Bauckham's "Introduction" tell us that:

The essays collected in this volume cover a wide variety of aspects of the study of the Gospel of John, but they cohere with an approach to the Gospel that differs very significantly from the approach that has been dominant in Johannine scholarship since the late 1970s, though there are signs that this dominant approach is now being undermined or at least considerably modified by very recent trends in Johannine scholarship. (9)

He goes on to explain exactly what this 'dominant approach' is in p. 9-12 listing 7 main elements. To summarize, these points are:

1. "Little if any credit is given to the traditions of the early church about the origins and authorship of the Gospel since they are held to be incompatible with the Gospel itself." (10)
2. "As an account of the history of Jesus this Gospel is far less reliable than the Synoptics, since its traditions have been so thoroughly shaped by the history of the highly distinctive Christian community in which they evolved." (10)
3. "The Gospel of John is the product of a complex history of literary composition which has left the marks of its various stages on the text as we have it, making it possible to construct its literary prehistory." (10)
4. "The Gospel is the product of and written for the so-called Johannine community, a small idiosyncratic branch of early Christianity, sectarian in character, isolated from the rest of the early Christian movement, and formed by its own particular history and conflicts." (11)

5. "Elements 3 and 4 coalesce in that the various stages of the composition of the Gospel are held to reflect developments in the history of the Johannine community." (11)
6. "The reconstruction of the history of the community is partly based on the so-called "two level" reading of the Gospel narrative, which assumes that the Gospel's story of Jesus is also to be understood as the story of the Johannine community." (11)
7. "Reconstructions of the history of the Johannine community are many and diverse, but there is broad agreement that the history focuses on the community's relationship to the Jewish matrix in which it arose and from which it later painfully separated." (11-12)

Bauckham challenges all of these points saying: "*Over the two decades during which I have pursued serious work on the Gospel, I have found myself abandoning one by one all of these elements of the dominant approach.*" (12)

Concerning authorship of the Gospel Bauckham says:

I take the view of many other scholars that the Gospel's portrayal of the beloved disciple makes most sense if he was not one of the Twelve, not one of the itinerant disciples who traveled around with Jesus, but a disciple resident in Jerusalem, who hosted Jesus and his disciples for the Last Supper and took the mother of Jesus into his Jerusalem home (19:27). (15)

Bauckham accepts the genre of the fourth Gospel (like the Synoptics) to be that of a Greco-Roman biography. He explains that there is a broad spectrum in this genre which allows for varying degrees of legend and historiography in the retelling of the events in a particular character's life. Bauckham says of his work in this area:

My own present contribution to this matter is chapter 4 below ("Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John"), which breaks new ground by comparing the Gospel with the characteristics of good historiographical method, as generally recognized in the Greco-Roman world, and showing that, however surprising this may be in light of most scholarly evaluations of the Gospel of John, it would have looked to contemporaries more like historiography than the Synoptics would have done. (19)

He later makes a very important point when he says:

It is important also to stress that these reader expectations were not those of modern readers of historiography. This is partly because all historiography in the ancient world was narrative, and skillful storytelling was a necessary and expected means of holding the readers' attention while also instructing them. (20)

In Bauckham's view: "*The Gospel's major images seem designed to make contact with the widest possible audience, and the author's storytelling skill is deployed to draw all sorts of readers into the Gospel's "quest for the Messiah"*" (22) He then makes a point about the Gospel's historicity that is so simple that it takes a critical scholar to misunderstand it. "*If the*

*Gospel is judged trustworthy so far as we can test it, then we should trust it for what we cannot verify. That is ordinary historical method.” (27)*

Concerning John’s Theology/Christology Bauckham says:

But in my view the common and fundamental Christology of all the New Testament writers is “high” in the sense that it portrays Jesus as sharing the divine identity of the one God of Israel, while at the same time it uses precisely the conceptuality of strict Jewish monotheism in order to formulate such a Christology. (29)

Bauckham rounds out the introduction by expressing his position on the literary unity of the Gospel. He doesn’t see it as the product of the Beloved Disciple, then an evangelist, and finally a redactor. He is of the group of scholars that holds John’s 21st chapter “as an integral part of the Gospel’s original design.” (31)

If there’s one thing we can say about Richard Bauckham it’s that he doesn’t follow the crowd. For years he has been blazing new ground and challenging the *status quo* of critical New Testament scholarship — this collection of essays is no different.

## **2. Papias and Polycrates on the Origin of the Gospel of John**

In this chapter (which was adapted from a paper originally published in *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1993): 24-69) Dr. Bauckham presents us with an interesting and in my opinion compelling argument for the author of the fourth Gospel, the ‘*beloved disciple*’ as being John the Elder as opposed to John the son of Zebedee. He builds upon a foundation laid by Martin Hengel’s *The Johannine Question* (SCM, 1989) but simplifies something that he feels Hengel complicated in his leaving room for the possibility that the son of Zebedee might be the beloved disciple.

Of particular interest for the budding Johannine student is Bauckham’s attention to Polycrates, the bishop of Ephesus, in his assessing the author of the fourth Gospel. He shows great attention to detail in examining a letter from Polycrates to Victor of Rome which was preserved by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.24.2-7). As Bauckham notes: “*The purpose of this letter is to defend the quartodecimen observance of Asia as supported by the highest authority in local tradition*” (37).

After noting the “*careful artistry*” of the letter with its references to “*seven great luminaries of Asia . . . [a]s the number of completeness, seven indicates the sufficiency of their witness . . . [and] [w]hen Polycrates subsequently refers to his seven relatives who were bishops . . . he is not adducing a second, unnecessary set of witnesses, but claiming the seven great luminaries themselves as his relatives*” (38), Bauckham sets his sights on explaining the element of Polycrates description which is “*the most puzzling and debated . . . the reference to John as a priest who wore the πέταλον.*”<sup>1</sup> (39)

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<sup>1</sup> The πέταλον (*petalon*) is the *plate* in the high priest’s crown which is engraved with the words ‘Holiness to Yahweh’ (see Exod. 28:36; 39:30; Lev. 8:9 in the LXX).

Bauckham says that “[a]ttempts to explain Polycrates words have hitherto fallen into two categories: metaphorical and historical.” (47) Of Polycrates’ words Bauckham concludes that:

The simplest explanation for them is that Polycrates (or the Ephesian church tradition that he followed) identified John the beloved disciple, who had died in Ephesus, with the John of Acts 4:6, not because he had any historical information to this effect, but as a piece of scriptural exegesis. The tradition that John the beloved disciple was a high priest is neither metaphorical nor historical, but exegetical. (49)

Bauckham then turns his attention to Papias and says that “[t]here should be no doubt that Papias knew the fourth Gospel.” (51) noting that Papias’ list of seven disciples follows the Johannine order. Bauckham explains how for Papias the fourth Gospel was written in the proper order (chronologically speaking) over and above Matthew and Mark (of course Mark was not an eyewitness but his Gospel was based on the eyewitness testimony of Peter). Bauckham argues that Papias “ascribed the fourth Gospel to John the Elder” (57).

He notes traces of Papias’ influence in the *Muratorian Canon* which calls John “one of the disciples” yet Andrew “one of the apostles” (59) which is of some importance. Bauckham argues that:

The author of the *Muratorian Canon* makes the distinction by calling John “one of the disciples” and Andrew “one of the apostles.” He did not need to call Andrew this to distinguish him from some other Andrew, but evidently did so to distinguish a member of the Twelve from John, who was not a member of the Twelve. This is the distinction Papias in fact makes, in the prologue, between Andrew and John the Elder — although he does not there need to use the word “apostle” to do so. That the author of the *Muratorian Canon* is deliberately working with the categories of disciples Papias distinguishes in the prologue is further suggested by the fact that the apostle he singles out is Andrew, who heads Papias’s list of seven disciples. (61-2)

After a brief section on the ‘echoes of Papias in Irenaeus and Clement’, Bauckham notes a few false leads in some writings that appear to be dependent on Papias but are not; and then concludes the chapter with a few pages on conflating John the Elder with John the son of Zebedee. I certainly appreciated Bauckham’s statement that “[t]he Fourth Gospel was never anonymous” noting that “Hengel has shown, as soon as Gospels circulated in the churches, they must have been known with authors’ names attached to them.” (68)

He says that:

The Fourth Gospel was known as John’s. In Asia, the tradition from Papias early in the second century to Polycrates at its end was that this John, the beloved disciple and the author of the Gospel, was John the Elder, a disciple of the Lord but not one of the Twelve, who had died in Ephesus. We know **of no dissent from** this tradition in Asia before the third century. It is not certain when the

identification of this John of Ephesus with John the son of Zebedee was first accepted in Asia, but it does not appear to have happened for more than a century after the writing of the Gospel. (68-9)

Another thing that is certainly appreciated is that in a footnote at the end of this chapter Bauckham alerts the reader that he has summarized and added on to these arguments in the 16th and 17th chapters of *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, hence we do not fall victim to reading an anthology of outdated essays – we have been directed to where improvement has been made.

### 3. The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author

In this chapter (originally published in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993) 21-44) Bauckham continues to draw heavily from Martin Hengel's *The Johannine Question*, in fact he opens the chapter by saying that it presupposes Hengel's solution, saying, "[i]n essence the solution is that John the Elder, to whom Papias refers in the famous fragment of his prologue . . . was both the beloved disciple and the author of the Fourth Gospel, as well as the author of the Johannine letters." (73)

He lists three considerations in Hengel's argument for John the Elder which I will abbreviate here:

1. "He accepts the common view that the beloved disciple in the Gospel represents the ideal disciple. This does not mean that the beloved disciple is not also a historical figure..."
2. "Hengel emphasizes the enigmatic nature of the references to the beloved disciple which leave his identity ambiguous..."
3. "Hengel thinks that in some respects the Gospel seems to hint at an identification of the beloved disciple with John the son of Zebedee, and thinks that certainly the redactors, perhaps even John the Elder himself, deliberately allowed the figure of the beloved disciple to suggest both John the Elder and John the son of Zebedee." (75)

It is this third point that Bauckham takes exception to saying:

In my view, Hengel has quite unnecessarily complicated and compromised his proposal by allowing a relic of old attribution to John the son of Zebedee back into his argument. In this context John the son of Zebedee is a phantom that needs to be finally and completely exorcised. (75)

Bauckham goes on to dispense with the idea of John the son of Zebedee as author due to the absence of the sons of Zebedee in the Fourth Gospel noting that they are only prominent in the Synoptics and even then only in Mark and Luke (probably so in Luke due to Mark's portrayal). He says "*they never appear in special Matthean tradition.*" (76)

Bauckham also argues that:

Anyone tempted to identify the anonymous disciple of 1:34-39 as John the Son of Zebedee ought to see at once that the presence of John the son of Zebedee without his brother James would be even more surprising here than the absence of John the son of Zebedee. (76)

He goes on to argue that “[t]he convention that the beloved disciple appears only anonymously in the Gospel is well enough established by this point for the reader not to expect it to be breeched here...” (77) What follows is an examination of what the Fourth Gospel has to say about its own author and a cogent presentation of John the Elder as not only ideal author, but also ideal witness — he does argue however (contra Hengel) that it is misleading to present the beloved disciple as merely the ideal disciple. Of this he says:

The beloved disciple may sometimes function in this way [i.e., ‘as a model for others, the ideal of discipleship’], just as other disciples (such as Nathanael and Mary Magdalene) in the Fourth Gospel do, but such a function cannot satisfactorily account for most of what is said about him. (82)

Bauckham presents Peter as the ideal disciple and John as the ideal witness noting quite insightfully that:

The narrative of the two disciples at the tomb skillfully correlates the two. The beloved disciple arrives first, but Peter goes in first. Peter has the priority as a witness to the evidence, but the beloved disciple has superiority in perceiving its significance. This point is usually misunderstood by those who see the beloved disciple as the ideal disciple. He is not here portrayed as the model for later Christians who believe in the resurrection without seeing (20:29), since it is expressly said that “he saw and believed” (20:8). The point is that, like Peter, he provides the eyewitness testimony that later Christians need in order to believe without seeing but, unlike Peter, he already perceives the significance of what they are both seeing. (86)

This was an enjoyable chapter and in my opinion an easier read than the one that preceded it, due in part to its shorter length, but also in part because of the scarcity of footnotes. Once again I was delighted to see Bauckham mention updates that he has made to this argument since the time of its original publication.

#### **4. Historiographical Characteristics in the Gospel of John**

In this chapter (originally published in *New Testament Studies* 53, no. 1 (2007): 17-36) Bauckham seeks to dispel the myth that John’s Gospel is merely theology and not history by breaking new ground by assessing the Fourth Gospel as historiography. He says:

This chapter is a first attempt to assess the Gospel of John by the features characteristic of Greco-Roman historiography. Its contention is that, far from appearing the least historical of the four Gospels, to a competent contemporary

reader John's Gospel will have seemed the closest to meeting the exacting demands of ancient historiography. (95)

The nice thing about breaking new ground is that there aren't many (if any) arguments against your position. For this reason Bauckham sets forth a pretty straightforward and unchallenged argument for the historiography of John's Gospel.

He begins by examining the topography of the Gospel noting that "[a] good historian was expected to have a thorough knowledge of the places where events of history took place..." [p. 95]. John is on par with the Synoptics for how many places are mentioned by name (Matt. = 35; Mark = 30; Luke = 30; John = 31), but dwarfs them in how many places are unique to his Gospel (Matt. = 8; Mark = 2; Luke = 5; John = 17 (!)) (98). Bauckham also notes that "*John's narratives are typically much longer than the Synoptic pericopes, so that, in a sense, far less happens in John. There are far fewer events to be located.*" (99) This explains John's tendency to be more specific with the places he does mention. Rather than simply naming a region, he can name the town or city in the region. Rather than just name a city or town, he can name a landmark in that town. Bauckham says: "[c]onsequently, throughout this Gospel we always know where Jesus is, usually very precisely." (99)

He then moves onto chronology and notes John's use of Jewish festivals in dating events: "*three Passovers (2:13; 6:4; 12:55) and the feasts of Tabernacles (7:2) and Hanukkah (10:22) between the second and third Passovers. In addition, there are the two weeks of counted days, one at the outset of Jesus' story . . . the other the last week of his story.*" (100) According to Bauckham "[i]t is surely the case that the prevalence of precise chronology in the Gospel of John would have made it look to contemporary readers, more like historiography than the Synoptics." (101)

Topography, Chronology, and Theology converge into what Bauckham describes as theological historiography. He prefers this description over and against one or the other designation by itself. He notes that the history of the Gospel is incorporated into a "metahistory" which is framed by reference to the beginning of time in John's Prologue and the end of time according to Jesus' final words in the Epilogue. (102)

He rounds this chapter out by examining briefly the selectivity of John in the events that he chooses to record, the narrative asides, eyewitness testimony, and the discourses and dialogues of the Fourth Gospel.

Concerning selectivity we see that the events in John are relatively fewer in number but he takes the time to develop his stories and a comparison of John's miracles with those of the Synoptics shows that he:

[S]elects the most impressive (e.g., the blind man had been blind *since birth* [9:1], Lazarus had been dead *four days* [11:17]) and those most significant in terms of their spiritual meaning as signs. The selectivity gives him space to develop the significance of the signs. (104)

Of the narrative asides (parentheses), John takes a lot of breaks to translate Hebrew/Aramaic words, explain certain things such as the Jewish customs, to cite Old Testament passages, etc. Bauckham simply notes that this is an area in which more research must be done before any concrete judgment can be made as to the significance of the similarities between John's Gospel and other narrative literature.

He doesn't develop the section on eyewitness testimony, but instead directs people to his book on the subject. He does say however that:

The historiographical ideal [. . .] was that the historian himself should have been a participant in many of the events and that he should have interviewed eyewitnesses of those events he could not himself have witnessed . . . In a literary context of this kind John's Gospel would seem readily to meet the contemporary requirements of reliable historiography, probably better than the Synoptic Gospels. (106)

Bauckham notes the extreme importance of discourse and dialogue in ancient historiography because of the oral/rhetorical culture in which it is set. There are two problems with speeches in historiography: (1) the sources, and (2) how to represent the speech. For an eyewitness or one who has interviewed eyewitnesses the source is more sure but then how to represent the speech becomes a problem. Bauckham says that:

Even in the rare case where a verbatim report were available, the historian could not merely transcribe it, for it would be far too long. This makes it clear that any speech in the context of a historical narrative could at best be only a representation of the speech actually delivered. (106-7).

Of the Gospels he says:

Both the Synoptic and the Johannine ways of representing the way Jesus taught combine realism and artificiality. In one sense, John's presentation is more realistic than theirs, but at the same time it required much more than theirs did the putting of words into Jesus' mouth. (109)

Time will tell how strong (or weak) Bauckham's arguments are for the Fourth Gospel as historiography, but until shown otherwise I find myself persuaded by the case that he makes for it.

## **5. The Audience of the Gospel of John**

In this chapter (originally published in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. R. T. Fortna and T. Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 101-11.) Bauckham challenges the long held beliefs that the Fourth Gospel was written especially for the so-called Johannine Community and underwent a series of redactions.

He draws from his earlier work “For Whom Were Gospels Written” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audience* and says that the Johannine Community has been long assumed but rarely argued for. His position is that from the evidence we do have we cannot conclude that the early Christian movement was composed of various isolated communities but was rather a “*network of communities in constant, close communication with each other*” (114). For this reason he feels that the Johannine Community hypothesis is implausible. He then sets forth a simple yet incredibly poignant argument when he says:

And if the Gospel was not addressed to a particular community, we cannot expect to learn much from it about the evangelists’ own community, even if there was only one such and even if it did influence his thinking and writing. (115)

He also challenges the two-level reading strategy championed by J. Louis Martyn saying that “*against the two-level reading strategy, the most important point to make is that it has no basis in the literary genre of the Fourth Gospel. It is genre that generally guides readers as to the reading strategy appropriate for a particular text.*” (117) He is here arguing that it doesn’t make sense in light of John’s Gospel fitting under the broad heading of Greco-Roman biography to read it as a history of Jesus concealing a history of the very community to which it was written. Such an interpretive approach is completely foreign to what we know of how ancient biographies were read.

He goes on to note various problems with this two-level reading in practice, such as inconsistency in application, the necessity of placing everything in temporal order to know the order in which the events of the community took place, every character in the Gospel not being able to plausibly represent a character in the community’s history and context. He says: “*Every example of the strategy in practice is riddled with arbitrariness and uncertainty. The more one realizes how complex and selective the practice of this reading strategy has to be, the less plausible it becomes.*” (117)

Bauckham then argues against the idea that the language and symbolism in John’s Gospel are somehow designed so that only the initiated can understand it. He gives three main reasons why this isn’t so:

First, the evangelist himself sometimes explains the meaning of figurative or enigmatic sayings of Jesus. [. . .] Second, the misunderstanding by Jesus’ hearers... frequently have the literary function of leading Jesus to explain the image he has used or to develop it in ways that clarify its meaning. [. . .] Third, what no characters in the Gospel understand before Jesus’ resurrection are his many enigmatic references to his coming death and resurrection. The evangelist makes it clear . . . (120-21)

For these reasons Bauckham believes that not only was the Fourth Gospel intended to be read and circulated throughout all believing communities, he also believes that it was intended to be read by interested non-Christians as well! He notes how the images in John “*come from the common experience of all people of the time: light and darkness, water, bread, vine and wine, shepherd and sheep, judgment and witness, birth and death.*” (122)

Another point he raises is how John is the most accessible of the Gospels to those with minimal knowledge and little education in the faith. I appreciated this observation very much because it resonates with my experience. When I was newly converted to Christ I spent a lot of time in the Gospel of John. It was the first book of the Bible that I had read and I read it quite a few times before moving on to the rest of the NT.

All in all I think Bauckham has done well to argue his point. I'm going to have to go back and read some of my favorite authors (e.g., Raymond Brown & Larry Hurtado) with fresh eyes and see how well they stand up to Bauckham's presentation.

## 6. The Qumran Community and the Gospel of John

In this chapter (originally published as "Qumran and the Gospel of John: Is There a Connection?" in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. S. E. Porter and C.A. Evans, JSPSup 26, Roehampton Institute London Papers 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 267-79) Bauckham deconstructs the commonly accepted position of many Johannine scholars that parallels between the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls "*are so impressive as to require a historical connection closer than could be provided merely by the common Jewish milieu of late Second Temple Judaism.*" (125)

Bauckham doesn't waste much time setting up his argument and instead dives right in, focusing on the "*connection to which most weight is usually given: the expression of dualistic thinking in light and darkness imagery in both the Qumran texts and the Fourth Gospel*" (126). He begins by noting the two different sets of dualistic images in John's Gospel, i.e., (1) light/darkness; (2) spatial imagery that appears in the terms: from above/from below, and not from this world/from this world. He says that "*[i]t is very important to notice that these two sets of images never combine or overlap in the Fourth Gospel. Each is kept distinct from the other.*" (127)

It is only in the light/darkness imagery that the Fourth Gospel and the Qumran texts have parallels but this is found in other Jewish literature that pre-dated the Qumran community. Aside from the fact that this dualism is extant in a plethora of ancient Jewish literature, Bauckham notes that it's the most obvious dualism in the natural world. He argues that the parallels are actually more dissimilar than they are similar.

He notes the dissimilarity in terminology saying that aside from "light" and "darkness" there is only one shared term ("sons of light") which appears once in John 12:36 as opposed to numerous times in the Qumran material: 1QS 1.9; 2.16; 3.13, 24, 25; 1QM 1.1, 3, 9, 11, 13; 4QCatena<sup>a</sup> (4Q177) 2.7; 4.16; 4QFlor (4Q174) 1.8-9; 4QSongs of the Sage<sup>a</sup> (4Q510) 1.7; 4QDamascus Document<sup>b</sup>(4Q267) 1.1 (130, n. 12). Bauckham concludes that "*[t]his single coincidence of terminology cannot carry much weight . . . it occurs only once in John, and is therefore no more characteristic of John than of Luke, Paul, and the author of Ephesians, each of whom, like John, use the expression just once.*" (130)

But the light/darkness imagery in John:

have no parallel in the Qumran texts: “the true light” (1:9; cf. 1 John 2:8), “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5), “to have the light” (8:12; 12:35-36), “to come to the light” (3:20-21), “to remain in the darkness” (12:46; cf. 1 John 2:9), and the contrast of “day” and “night” (9:4; 11:9-10). (131)

He also argues that the way in which this imagery functions in the Qumran material is absent from John. The Qumran material depicts spirits of light and darkness at war with each other while in John’s Gospel Jesus is depicted as the light while the devil is never depicted as darkness, instead he is seen as the ruler of this world or the father of lies. Neither is the conflict of light and darkness within the heart of the individual or the conflict between the sons of light and the sons of darkness present in John. He also argues that the imagery is not used in an eschatological sense in John as it is in the Qumran texts and other Jewish literature. In short, the parallels aren’t that similar.

He goes on to note that aside from one reference in the Qumran material (1QM 1.8), light is never seen shining in the darkness to give light to people so that they can come out of darkness. Yet this is precisely the manner in which the duality is seen in the Fourth Gospel.

Bauckham finishes off the chapter by noting the various examples of light/darkness imagery in other ancient Jewish literature such as Genesis, Isaiah, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, 2 Enoch, et al., and showing how exegetes throughout history have drawn from the images in these texts (esp. the creation narrative of Genesis). In other words, John didn’t need the Qumran material or community to draw his inspiration (I use the term loosely) from. In addition to this chapter I would recommend Craig Keener’s 2 Volume commentary on the Gospel of John to see a multitude of examples of the light/darkness imagery in ancient sources from which John likely did draw.

This was a solid chapter but decidedly not my favorite. I appreciated the brevity with which Bauckham addressed the issue but I think he could have left this chapter out of the book without doing it any harm.

## **7. Nicodemus and the Gurion Family**

[Not Reviewed]

## **8. The Bethany Family in John 11—12: History or Fiction?**

In this chapter (apparently an essay original to the book) Bauckham argues for the historicity of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. He begins by noting that his concern is the historicity of these three people but their historicity “*can scarcely be separated from the historicity of the events in which they are involved in John’s narrative: the resuscitation of Lazarus by Jesus, and the anointing of Jesus by Mary.*” (173)

In looking at the personal names he states the obvious which is that the Lazarus of John 11-12 is not the Lazarus of (what he identifies as) the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Drawing from Tal Ilan’s *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* and his own statistics

in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Bauckham tells us that Lazarus was the third most popular name among Palestinian Jews following Simon and Jacob. He also tells us that Mary was the most common female name among Palestinian Jews while Martha was fourth most common, but unlike the two Lazaruses in Luke and John, Bauckham sees too much correspondence between the Marys and Marthas of these two Gospels to deny that they are describing the same set of sisters.

Concerning John's relationship with Luke he notes that while John locates the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, Luke knows no such tradition. But "[t]his merely shows that the tradition Luke knew gave no specific location for the story. The difference does establish that Luke's story is not dependent on John, for Luke is not likely to have ignored John's specific location of the family in Bethany." (177) Bauckham also says that Lazarus not appearing in Luke's account is not a plausible argument against its historicity because "[i]n Gospel pericopes as brief and focused as Luke 10:38-42, extraneous details unnecessary to the story are not to be expected." (178) He sees "no convincing verbal contacts" between the two stories but notes that "most commentators have noticed the consistency of characterization of the two sisters in the two Gospels, but are sharply divided on the significance of this." (178)

When turning his attention to the timing and location of the Jesus' anointing in John and Mark, Bauckham notes that John probably knew Mark's account rather than both depending on a common oral source, but that this doesn't preclude John from having independent knowledge of the event. He also notes that what appears to be contradictory in the two accounts is in fact not contradictory at all upon closer examination. Mark seems to date the event two days before the Passover (Mk. 14:1) while John dates it six days before the Passover (Jo. 12:1). Mark places the event in the house of Simon the Leper (Mk. 14:3) while John places it in the house of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.

Bauckham explains this by saying that:

Mark makes the supper at Bethany the 'filling' in a typical Markan 'sandwich' (an ABA pattern, thus: 14:1-2 + 14:3-9 + 14:10-11). He frames the event with the two stages of the plot against Jesus: (1) the authorities determine to put Jesus to death, but hesitate to provoke the people to riot (14:1-3); (2) Judas offers to betray Jesus, thus enabling the authorities to arrest him secretly, away from the crowds (14:10-11). Markan sandwiches are contrived for thematic rather than chronological reasons. [...] Recognizing that Mark's apparent chronology here is artificial makes it entirely possible that John is historically correct in placing the anointing prior to the triumphal entry. It is an example of John's habitual precision in chronological and geographical matters, a precision that distinguishes John markedly from the Synoptics. (180)

Concerning the raising of Lazarus Bauckham says that the weightiest argument against its historicity is the Synoptic silence of the event. He explains this by pointing out the Synoptic focus on the Galilean ministry of Jesus against John's greater attention to the events in Jerusalem and Judaea, as well as "*Mark's compositional decision (followed by Matthew and Luke) to limit the narration of miracles to the earlier stages of Jesus' ministry...*" (181)

In the final section of the chapter Bauckham makes a case for Mark's not naming Mary as an example of "protective anonymity" — he relies heavily on the work of Gerd Theissen for this claim. In Mark's Gospel there are three characters that go unnamed but are later named in John's Gospel. They are: (1) the woman who anoints (Mk. 14:3) who John reveals as Mary (Jo. 12:3); (2) the man who wields the sword (Mk. 14:47) who John reveals as Simon Peter (Jo. 18:10); and (3) the servant of the high priest (Mk. 14:47) who John reveals as Malchus (Jo. 18:10).

The reason for the anonymity is simple, to protect those mentioned. Simon Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. If either had been named then Simon Peter could have been caught and prosecuted accordingly. The woman's anointing of Jesus had messianic significance. Bauckham says:

[T]his woman would be in danger were she identified as having been complicit in Jesus' politically subversive claim to messianic kingship. Her act, in its context of the last days of Jesus in Jerusalem, would be easily seen as the anointing entailed by the term Messiah, comparable with the anointing of kings in the Hebrew Bible. (185)

Concerning Lazarus, his story is too well known, argues Bauckham. For him "*protective anonymity' had to take the form of his total absence from the story as it was publicly told.*" (189) I find Bauckham's arguments in this chapter fascinating, and certainly worthy of consideration, but I'm not exactly clear on the significance of the historicity of these narratives. I'm assuming that in the overall scheme of things, the historicity of these particular events and people lends credence to the historicity of the Gospel, although this isn't specifically what Bauckham spells out in this chapter.

## 9. Did Jesus Wash His Disciples' Feet?

In this chapter (originally published in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, New Testament Tools and Studies 28/2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 411-29) Bauckham argues for the historicity of the narrative of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13. He begins the chapter by noting that:

The legacy of the nineteenth-century liberals' distinction between historically reliable, early sources (Mark and Q) and late, theological fiction (John) endures, even if only subliminally, in the minds of many New Testament scholars and students. (191)

Bauckham of course, has been arguing contrary to this position throughout the course of these essays. He mentions that it is now widely accepted that John is dependent upon Gospel traditions independent of the Synoptics (while he may also have made use of one or more of them), but that this "*still rarely ensures a level playing field between John and the Synoptics when it comes to evaluating the historical value of their narrative traditions.*" (191)

He is heavily reliant on J. C. Thomas' *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, for the evidence on which his arguments rely in this chapter. A brief look is taken at foot washing in antiquity, where a few things are pointed out:

1. This was a common practice.
2. It was for hygienic purposes.
3. It was an act of hospitality.
4. Guest's were usually required to wash their own feet.
5. It was an unpleasant task for another to wash someone's feet.
6. The lowest slave or servant would perform the task.

Bauckham notes how it would be a contradiction of social relationships for a superior to wash an inferior's feet, although an inferior washing a superior's feet would be a sign of great devotion. With regard to the footwashing episode in John 13, Bauckham see two interpretations at work. The first is in Jesus' dialogue with Peter (13:6-11) and the second is in Jesus' speech after he resumes his seat (13:12-20). He says:

Both are christological, taking their meaning from the fact that it is Jesus the Lord who serves as a slave, but the first is christological and soteriological, the second christological and exemplary. (194)

He goes on to argue that the first interpretation won't be evident to the disciples until after Jesus' resurrection, and that its meaning is connected with Jesus' death. The second he sees as parallel with Philippians 2:5-11, which exemplifies Christ's humiliation and subsequent exaltation, but is used as an example of how Christians are to treat each other.

When Bauckham turns to the question of this account being an original creation of the author of the Fourth Gospel, or an interpretation of a standing Christian tradition, he follows three lines of inquiry:

1. The evidence within the Fourth Gospel.
2. The evidence between John 13:20 and the sayings in the Synoptics.
3. The evidence of the Christian practice of foot washing outside of the Gospels.

Regarding the internal evidence, Bauckham thinks that there is no good reason to believe that John freely creates narratives at will. Rather, he notes the relatively few events recorded in John as opposed to the Synoptics, yet their extended narration and more reflective interpretation. He believes that John, no doubt, had more traditional material to choose from, but chose only those events which were most important to him.

For the second point Bauckham focuses on thematic similarities, namely the saying of Jesus in the Synoptics to the effect that the greatest among the disciples must be their servant. He presents two tables that examine: (1) Luke 22:24-27 & Mark 10:41-45 = Matthew 20:24-28, and (2) Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; & Luke 9:46-48. All of this suggests to Bauckham that:

If the Synoptic sayings are not a source of John's footwashing narrative, then they can be invoked in support of the historical value of John's narrative by the criterion of coherence. (203)

As for the evidence of foot washing outside of the Gospels, Bauckham notes that there is only one reference to the practice in 1 Timothy 5:10. He disagrees with J. C. Thomas that foot washing was a "*widespread religious rite...in early Christianity.*" (204) He sees the examples in early Christianity as examples of foot washing in its normal context, as a showing of hospitality, and preparation for fellowship meals.

Bauckham closes this chapter saying:

Footwashing was one of the most countercultural practices of Early Christianity, symbolizing most radically the status-rejecting ideals of the early Christian communities. Its origin calls for explanation. It might be a practice initiated within earliest Christianity, under the inspiration of those sayings of Jesus that require his disciples to relate to each other by humble service rather than by self-aggrandizing lordship. John's story of the footwashing might then be an etiological myth, projecting the origin of this distinctive practice back into Jesus' ministry. But such a speculation is less plausible than the obvious alternative: that, just as Jesus dined with outcasts and blessed children, so also he washed his disciples' feet. (206)

I have to be honest in admitting that I find the practice of foot washing to be one of the most repulsive things a person could do. But somehow, Bauckham turned such a revolting subject into something that was fascinating to read. I think there is much merit to his view of this narrative, but I am more impressed with his going against the scholarly grain, treating John's Gospel as being every bit as historical as the Synoptics. He recognizes John's leeway to creatively attribute words to Jesus (see 191, n. 1), while not recognizing such freedom to create narratives out of thin air.

## **10. Jewish Messianism According to the Gospel of John**

[Not Reviewed]

## **11. Monotheism and Christology in the Gospel of John**

In this chapter (originally published in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 148-66) Bauckham makes the case for his celebrated "Christology of divine identity" in the Fourth Gospel. He begins by noting that one of the foundational tenets of monotheism was YHWH as Creator of all things, indeed, it was this distinction between Creator/created that differentiated YHWH from the idols of the nations. He turns immediately to John's prologue and notes the obvious echoes and allusions to the creation account of Genesis 1. Here the Word is identified with God as the creator of all things, yet distinct from the God he is with, while the whole time being differentiated from the creation,

standing above it. He notes the common Jewish background within which the Word would be understood and says:

We should not, with many scholars writing on the Johannine Prologue, use the term Logos, as though John's Greek word means more than simply "word." It carries no particular metaphysical baggage. It refers simply to God's word as portrayed in Jewish creation accounts, and this is why it does not appear in John's Gospel after the prologue. In the prologue he uses the term to identify the preexistent Christ *within the Genesis creation narrative*, and so within the unique identity of God *as already understood by Jewish monotheism*. (241)

From here Bauckham goes on to briefly examine John 5:17ff and make an argument for Jesus being included in the divine identity by his exercising divine prerogatives. He says that: "[i]n his radical dependence on God, he is not equal to God in the sense that the Jewish leaders intend, but he is equal to God in the sense that what the Father gives him to do are the uniquely divine prerogatives." (242) He also argues that Jesus does not simply act as a mere agent, someone standing in for God, but rather he acts as God doing only the things that God himself can do. In quoting John 5:23, Bauckham equates Jesus' mention of honoring the Son as one honors the Father as a reference to worship, and in the Jewish tradition, the only true God is to be worshipped.

The main part of this chapter focuses on Jesus' "I Am" sayings in which Bauckham outlines two sets of seven such sayings. The first set are those with a predicate and the second set are those without. He briefly treats each, and focuses in mainly on the Isaianic parallels scattered throughout Isaiah 40-55. These sayings in Isaiah are some of the most emphatic in declaring the absolute and unique identity of YHWH as the only true God. Bauckham concludes saying:

One series, the "I am sayings with predicates, focus on Jesus as the only Savior in a variety of images instancing the inexhaustible fullness of what salvation means. In these sayings, as in the signs, it is implicit that Jesus can be the only Savior only because he is identified with the only God. To reveal the glory of God's unique identity, to give the eternal life that God alone has in himself, Jesus must himself belong to God's own unique identity. This is what the absolute "I am" sayings make fully explicit, in a sevenfold series of progressive clarity, in which Jesus utters the most concise and comprehensive expression of all that it means for God to be uniquely and truly God. (250)

The chapter is closed out with a short discussion of the oneness of Jesus and the Father, in which Bauckham focuses mainly on John 10:30 with reference to John 17. He sees a connection between Jesus' statement in John 10:30 and the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, noting that the LXX use of the masculine *heis* (one) in the Shema and John's use of the neuter *hen* (one) here was a "necessary adaptation of language [because] Jesus is not saying that he and the Father are a single person, but that together they are one God." (251) I quite agree with this proposition, but I don't agree with what follows it.

Bauckham goes on to claim that the oneness of Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 is the same oneness he mentions in John 10:30. I have long argued against this very proposition on the basis of the differing contexts. In John 10:30 we have Jesus claiming oneness with the Father in salvation. He's the Good Shepherd who brings about the salvation of the sheep, while in John 17 he prays for a oneness of agreement between believers as exists between him and the Father. But all is not lost; Bauckham goes on to clarify his position saying:

This Jewish topos, of course, in no way implies that God is a unity in the same sense that his people are, only that the divine singularity draws the singular people of God together into a relational unity. Similarly Jesus prays that his disciples will be a single community corresponding to the uniqueness of the one God in which he and his Father are united (see also 10:16). (251)

While I'm much more comfortable with this clarification, I'm not convinced that Bauckham has made his case for equating the two passages. In closing, Bauckham makes some of the simplest, yet most profound statements in the entire chapter when he turns his attention to Jesus' statements concerning his and the Father's mutual indwelling and the Jewish reaction to this. He says:

Evidently, this reciprocal indwelling—the closest conceivable intimacy of relationship—is the inner reality of the oneness of Father and Son. Their unity does not erase their difference, but differentiates them in an inseparable relationship. We should also notice that the terms “Father” and “Son” entail each other. The Father is called Father only because Jesus is his Son, and Jesus is called Son only because he is the Son of his divine Father. Each essential to the identity of the other. (251)

I think Bauckham's overall case for a “Christology of divine identity” is compelling, and it was represented nicely, although much too briefly in this essay. The interested reader will want to get their hands on Bauckham's *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* or the forthcoming *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* which includes and expands on the former work. And in the meantime, allow me to commend to your attention Bauckham's online essay “Paul's Christology of Divine Identity.”<sup>2</sup>

## **12. The Holiness of Jesus and His Disciples in the Gospel of John**

[Not Reviewed]

## **13. The 153 Fish and the Unity of the Gospel of John**

[Not Reviewed]

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<sup>2</sup> Available online at: [http://www.forananswer.org/Top\\_JW/Richard\\_Bauckham.pdf](http://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/Richard_Bauckham.pdf)