

Book Reviews

Theological Studies
2014, Vol. 75(4) 899–939
© Theological Studies, Inc. 2014
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0040563914548658
tsj.sagepub.com


Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study. By Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. Pp. xvi + 249. \$34.99.

Moloney brings a lifetime of studying the Gospel of John with literary, theological, and spiritual sophistication to this slim volume that is a testament to his own body of work as well as his careful reading of other Johannine scholarship. Focused and accessible, his investigation of the love theme in the Fourth Gospel is a careful academic analysis of the material, with M.'s familiar emphasis on how literary structure reveals theological meaning. Like a good teacher, M. knows how to engage an audience with a captivating story. Previous scholars have explored the major themes pursued in this book, such as love in the Gospel, the crucifixion of Jesus as exaltation, and the way the Christology of the Fourth Gospel points to the theology of the Father. M.'s contribution here is primarily twofold: first, to show the intimate association between the love theme and the "hour" of Jesus, and second, to balance an overemphasis on Jesus' *words* about love in the Fourth Gospel with attention to his *actions* that reveal love, not only for the Johannine community but also for the world. M. accomplishes these objectives by a deft combination of attention to both overarching literary structures and specific exegetical detail.

After presenting an overview of the Gospel's structure—especially helpful in orienting the nonspecialist—M. carefully elucidates how the Gospel sets forth its major themes, particularly by building anticipation in the reader/listener for the "hour" of Jesus that "has not yet come" (2:4; 7:6; 30; 8:20). Three closely related motifs that receive emphasis in John 3–4 reappear with development in John 17, providing a "literary frame" (66) unique to this Gospel that controls the understanding of Jesus' words and actions in the intervening chapters: (1) Jesus' accomplishment in the hour of the task given him by the Father (4:34; 17:4); (2) the description of that task (3:16; 17:2–3); and (3) the importance of Jesus' having been sent to fulfill this task (3:16–17; 17:1–26). The emphasis on that task points to the "*simultaneous association* of the crucifixion with Jesus' exaltation" (81) as the culmination of his mission to enable others to enter into that same relationship of love that he shares with the Father, a "gathering" of those who will witness to the "the glory of God manifested *on the cross* and the glorification of Jesus *by means of the cross*" (98).

In recounting Jesus' final evening with those who would form the core of the new community of love, M. astutely concentrates on three episodes: the *actions* of love in

the foot washing and gift of bread (13:1–38), the *speaking* of love in the double use of the command to love (15:12–17), and the *prayer* for love (17:1–26). Those emphases on love, M. shows, clearly point to the cross as the pinnacle of self-giving love in action, of Jesus' loving both to the end of his life laid down and the fulfillment of that mission given by the Father. A particularly enlightening point by M. is that the structure of John 19:16b–37 shows that central to the crucifixion narrative is not so much the death itself, which has already been indicated throughout the Gospel, but rather the gift of Jesus' mother to the Beloved Disciple and vice versa; in other words, the founding of the new community of love is central in the depths, or heights, of "the hour" of self-giving love.

The Gospel's final two chapters address the two significant issues remaining: "the completion of the 'hour' for Jesus, and the consequences of his death, resurrection, and ascension for believers of all times" (162). Although the point will continue to be controversial, M. makes a credible case for the purpose of the Gospel as missionary rather than sectarian, citing as evidence another literary frame, including the "'salvific' relationship between the Logos and 'the world'" (207) in John 1, the sending of the Son for salvation in John 3, and the mission of the disciples to "bear fruit" for the belief of the world in John 15 and 17. Finally, M. takes a welcome step by suggesting how the understanding of the cross in John can contribute to contemporary Christian spirituality, which tends toward an overemphasis on the cross as only a place of torture, sin, and death. While that interpretation is appropriate to Mark and Paul, the Fourth Gospel associates the cross more intimately with love, enabling us to see self-giving commitment to the good, despite the cost, as "the 'stuff' of love" itself (213). A personal anecdote (in a footnote) and astute quotations from Gerard Manley Hopkins accentuate the point elegantly and conclude this major contribution to Johannine studies.

Pamela E. Hedrick
Saint Joseph's College of Maine

The Resurrection of the Messiah: A Narrative Commentary on the Resurrection Accounts in the Four Gospels. By Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B. New York: Paulist, 2013. Pp. xvi + 203. \$21.95.

This is a scholarly, narrative commentary on the resurrection stories in the four Gospels. It is dedicated to the memory of Raymond E. Brown, S.S., and its title is modeled on two mature works of his, *The Birth of the Messiah* (1977) and *The Death of the Messiah* (1994). However, while those were works of historical-critical scholarship, Moloney's approach is narrative-critical and differs therefore in character from the book that Brown might have written, had he lived to fill out a trilogy. While M. greatly admires Brown's historical-critical work, he is convinced that his own narrative approach, which by no means disregards the historical questions associated with the resurrection stories, provides a more ample account of their significance. As M.