BOOK REVIEWS


This collection contains six essays on various passages and themes from John’s gospel, four by O. Hofius, two (including one of more than 100 pages) by H.-Chr. Kammler. Three (all by Hofius) have been previously published. All six are united by a strong theological interest, and by the aim to give a “textimmanente Interpretation” (v). Because the essays deal with divergent topics and are interrelated on minor points only, I shall discuss them individually. A general remark will follow at the end.

The first contribution is Hofius’ “Struktur und Gedankengang des Logos-Hymnus in Joh 1,1-18” (1-23; orig. in *ZNW* 78 [1987] 1-25). In Hofius’ view, the hymn on the Logos used by the evangelist comprises John 1:1-5, 9-12c, 14, 16. This hymn displays a very regular structure and a clear logical line, and consists of two parts, the first one (vv. 1-5, 9) on the Logos asarkos, and the second one (vv. 10-12c, 14, 16) on the Logos ensarkos. The present tense ἐπιλέπτω in v. 5, said of the Logos after the repeated ἦν of the preceding verses, makes me doubt whether the Logos ensarkos does not appear until v. 10; my doubt is strengthened by the fact that immediately after v. 5 the evangelist inserted his first reference to John the Baptist, suggesting thereby that he read v. 5 as being about Jesus’ historical appearance. Hofius’ reasonings to get rid of these difficulties (18-19, esp. n. 114) are not very convincing.

Hofius’ second essay also concerns John’s Prologue: “‘Der in des Vaters Schoß ist’ Joh 1,18” (24-32; orig. in *ZNW* 80 [1989] 163-171). Following H. Gese, he interprets εἰς τὸν κόσμον τοῦ πατρός against the background of Prov. 8:30 (where τὸς means “held in the lap”) as “in the Father’s lap”. He reinforces this interpretation by referring to the explanation of Prov. 8:30 given by R. Eliezer son of R. Yose the Galilean (ca. 150 C.E.) according to *‘Abot R. Nat.* (rec. A) 31: R. Eliezer applies the biblical text to the pre-existent Torah as God’s child in his lap. This reading of John’s text then elucidates the polemical tenor of John 1:17-18.

“Das Wunder der Wiedergeburt. Jesu Gespräch mit Nikodemus Joh 3,1-21” (33-80), again from the hand of Hofius, is an elaborate exegesis of John 3:1-21. The following are some of the salient points. Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus continues up to and including v. 21; “the earthly things” of v. 12 are what precedes in vv. 1-11, “the heavenly things” what follows in vv. 13-21. In v. 3, ἀνωθεν means “again”. Nicodemus’ question in v. 4 does not express misunderstanding but shows the impossibility for human beings to grasp what the new birth means. Vv. 13-17 display a chiasitic structure, in which vv. 13, 17 are about the incarnation, and vv. 14-15, 16 about the death on the cross. Vv. 18-21 show a concentric structure, with v. 19 at the centre; these verses do not deal with the human decision for or against Jesus, but with the fact that salvation is given only to those whom God has predestined for it. I mention here two points of criticism. Firstly, in discussing vv. 3ff., Hofius overlooks that within John’s gospel, ἀνωθεν can only mean “from above”; that this meaning does not exclude that Jesus is speaking of a new birth.
but emphasizes its quality, and that Nicodemus’ misunderstanding lies in his omission of ἀνέβηθεν (see Ἴδε 48 [1987] 143-144). Secondly, Hofius is too ready to assume single meanings where John’s thought is evidently complex. The clear-cut distinction between incarnation and death in vv. 13-17 neglects the idea that for John Jesus’ death is the end point of the incarnation. Hofius restricts the reference of ἡμῶνα to Jesus’ death on the cross, whereas the tradition history of the term strongly suggests that Jesus’ elevation into heaven is indirectly also at stake (see now M.C. de Boer, Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus [Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 17; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996] 162-173). He speaks of predestination in John without taking into account that the evangelist ascribes belief and unbelief to both divine and human decision.

Hofius’ fourth contribution is “Erwägung und Bewahrung. Zur Auslegung von Joh 6,37” (81-86; orig. in IBei 8 [1977] 24-29). He argues here convincingly that “not casting out” in John 6:37 refers to being preserved by Jesus, and not to being accepted by him.

Kammler’s first contribution, “Jesus Christus und der Geistparaklet. Eine Studie zur johanneischen Verhältnisbestimmung von Pneumatologie und Christologie” (87-190) is in fact a small monograph, with its own table of contents and bibliograph. By means of an exegesis of the five Paraclete sayings (John 14:16-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15), Kammler intends to show the “christologische Rückbindung” (88, 182) of John’s pneumatology: it is the task of the Spirit-Paraclete, whom John understands as a divine person, to bring people to the salvific knowledge of Jesus. The Paraclete does not go beyond Jesus, but he discloses Jesus’ person and work to the believer. The evangelist considers his gospel itself as “die im Lichte der österlichen Verherrlichung Christi erfolgte autoritative und unüberbietbare Erinnerung des Geistparakleten an die Selbststoffenbarung Jesu” (182). The Paraclete sayings are an integral part of the Fourth Gospel; the same conception of the Spirit in relation to Jesus as we find in these sayings is found in the rest of John. It might seem at first sight that John 1:32-34 and 3:34b are exceptions: in these two passages the gift of the Spirit seems to make Jesus into the Messianic Son of God. However, in 1:32-34 the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus is a sign for John the Baptist that Jesus is the one who will baptize in the Spirit, and in 3:34b Jesus, not God, is the giver of the Spirit. The following details of Kammler’s argument are worth mentioning. The main addressees of the Paraclete sayings are not the disciples of the earthly Jesus, but the Christian community after Easter. Jesus’ words in 14:2-3 concern present, not future, eschatology (the same is said to be valid for 12:26 and 17:24). In 16:13, τὰ ἐργάζεσθαι refers, just as in 18:4, to the whole of Jesus’ passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and return to the Father. I am in broad agreement with Kammler as far as the main lines of his argument are concerned, but have a few critical comments to make. Just like Hofius does in his contribution, Kammler tends to underestimate the fact that John’s gospel is in many respects multivocal, not univocal. Some of the points mentioned above on Hofius (esp. the emphasis on predestination) apply similarly to Kammler. Besides these, one could ask why Kammler does not take seriously the narrative character of the gospel and say that in the pre-Easter disciples the post-Easter church is addressed? I doubt whether Kammler’s exegesis of 14:2-3 (and related passages) is correct. He overlooks the phrase ἐστίν εἰμι ἐγώ and the difference between 14:2-3 and 14:23: whereas in the latter passage the Father and Jesus come to the disciples, the former speaks of the disciples being brought to the place where Jesus is.

Kammler’s second contribution is “Die ‘Zeichen’ des Auferstandenen. Überlegungen zur Exegese von Joh 20,30+31” (191-211). Here, he draws attention to the problems that arise when σημεῖα in John 20:30 is supposed to refer to Jesus’ miracles, and he proposes an alternative interpretation: the word concerns “die österlichen Selbsterweise Jesu und nur sie” (208; K.’s italics). It seems to me that Kammler’s