

12-2006

## Lewis' "The Gospel According to John and the Johannine Letters" - Book Review

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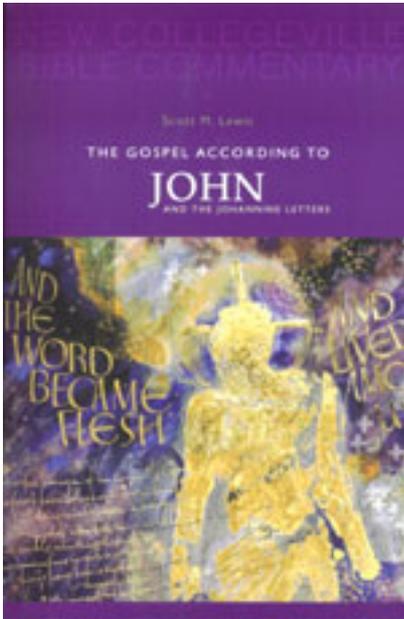
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### Recommended Citation

Previously published in *Review of Biblical Literature*, 2006 <http://bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=5012&CodePage=5012>

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**Lewis, Scott M.**

***The Gospel according to John and the Johannine Letters***

New Collegeville Bible Commentary 4

Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005. Pp. 142.  
Paper. \$6.95. ISBN 081462863X.

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As volume 4 in the New Testament series of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary, this small volume packs a great deal into its concise 142 pages. Displaying the text at the top of each page from the New American Bible translation, Scott Lewis divides the text of the Gospel and Letters of John into major sections and then into smaller units, commenting on the relevant issues along the way. While the book is intended for the student rather than the scholar, it nonetheless gets at most of the important interpretive issues, characteristically with sound judgment and helpful insights along the way. In this book we clearly have an accessible and readable piece by someone who has thought long and hard about the important Johannine issues, and the reader is helped by many thoughtful insights along the way.

Lewis fittingly introduces his commentary by situating the Johannine writings among the other canonical Gospels, noting primary distinctives. He also comments on the context of the Johannine situation, pointing out that “John reserves his strongest vitriol for fellow Christians who differ with him in matters of theology” (6). These comments are developed further in the rest of the commentary as relevant to particular texts. While a short annotated bibliography points the interested reader to some of the primary Johannine contributions in recent years, Lewis primarily engages ancient texts rather than

modern scholars. For a student-oriented text, this is appropriate, and a particular strength of Lewis's work is his concise dealing with three primary sets of texts: other passages in the Johannine corpus, similar passages in the Synoptics, and parallels found in Hebrew Scripture, including the Apocrypha.

On issues relevant to other Johannine texts, Lewis does well to connect the Prologue of the Gospel with that of 1 John, making the worship setting of this sector of early Christianity apparent. Likewise, thematic developments of such Johannine themes as abiding/remaining, the hour of Jesus, light-darkness dualism, blindness and sight, signs and faith, the I-Am sayings, life, and love all are treated helpfully for the lay reader. Connections are also made between the love commandment of Jesus in John 13 and also in the first two epistles, and contextual tensions with "the world" are commented upon helpfully.

Likewise helpful are the connections made with parallel passages in the Synoptics. After pointing out some of the primary differences between John and the Synoptics, Lewis helpfully comments on similarities and differences regarding the timing of the temple cleansing, the feeding of the multitude, the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, the entry into Jerusalem, the passion events, and the appearance narratives. He correctly regards John 20:31 as a first ending and with Brown and others divides the Gospel up into the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50) and the Book of Glory (13:1-20:31), between the Prologue (1:1-18) and the Epilogue (21:1-25). This being the case, it is unclear why "The Passion Narrative (John 18:1-19:42)" is accorded its own section (what happens to ch. 20, then [85-98]?), as it seems to be a part of the Book of Glory. Tensions with the Synoptic and Pauline presentations of the *parousia* in John 21 are also spelled out, as is the rehabilitation of Peter and its ecclesial implications. The Jewish and Hellenistic settings of the writings are also introduced helpfully, as the primary scriptural connections are introduced so as to provide the textual background of many of the references.

Lewis does a decent job of situating the Johannine writings in their sociological and religious contexts. He is thus able to develop both the Jewish-Christian dialogues with regards to Jesus' messiahship as well as the Gentile-Christian dialogues with regards to docetizing tendencies to deny the incarnation of Jesus. He regards the Presbyter's struggle with Diotrephes in 3 John as "more of a personal power struggle" (130) with a fellow church leader, rather than one whose charge is carried forward by "an extended institution or structured community" (129). The "chosen lady" and her children refers to the congregation rather than a particular female leader (125), according to Lewis.

Overall, this book includes a great wealth of information, and while one might suggest such considerations as drawing closer links between the Ignatian counsel regarding

monepiscopal approaches to institutionalization and Diotrephes' assertion of primacy, the reader is greatly helped by many valuable insights along the way. I might also do a bit more with the impact of emperor worship under Domitian in Asia Minor between 81 and 96 C.E. and the martyrological implications of the exhortation to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus, as this would add particular focus to strategic importance of the Johannine antidocetic corrective. Nonetheless, Lewis comments on the Johannine situation helpfully and represents some of the prevalent views of mainstream scholars adequately.

The book does very little that is new, but that is not its purpose. It does an exceptionally clear job of accomplishing what it sets out to do, which is to introduce the thoughtful reader to the Gospel and Letters of John in such a way as to pique interest and make for meaningful interpretation. As I think about the value of a study guide such as this, I ask myself whether I might consider using it in my college-level Writings of John course. In terms of its value and general helpfulness for the lay interpreter, the answer in this case is a clear yes. It packs a lot into a short volume, and even teachers are helped by being reminded of the primary contours and pertinent details of their subjects along the way.