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"Crossing Borders" The Life and Work of Peder Borgen in Context

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Crossing Borders

The Life and Work of Peder Borgen in Context

TORREY SELAND

Foreword by Paul N. Anderson

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Foreword

*Paul N. Anderson*¹

THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION OF PEDER BORGEN—A ROYALLY DISTINGUISHED BIBLICAL SCHOLAR

SO, HOW MANY BIBLICAL scholars receive a royal knighthood from the King of Norway, become the chair of the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters (receiving also its Gunnerus Medal, its highest honor), get elected president of the Society of New Testament Studies (the most prestigious religious society in the world), have two Festschriften gathered in their honor, serve as editor of *Novum Testamentum* and as chief editor of the journal's monograph series, provide international and national ecumenical leadership, serve in pastoral leadership, get offered teaching positions at top academic institutions in America and Europe, have their works included in collected essays and a distinguished monograph series, and have their life story published by one of their leading students?

Such is the case for Peder Borgen, and in this fine overview of his life, service, and scholarship, Torrey Seland—Borgen's first doctoral student at Trondheim—not only honors his professor and friend; he also serves well the interests of biblical scholarship and religious leadership worldwide. As a thorough and thoughtful overview of the life of Peder Borgen,

1. Paul N. Anderson serves as Professor of Biblical and Quaker Studies at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, and as Extraordinary Professor of Religion at the North-West University of Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Crossing Borders: The Life and Work of Peder Borgen in Context documents his personal sojourn and contributions to church and society, in addition to covering the scholarly contribution of a world-class biblical scholar and theologian. Too rarely is a scholar's personal story considered as the backdrop, or even the foreground, of one's academic work. In that sense, Torrey Seland's detailed biography is inextricably linked to Borgen's bibliography: a multitude of connections that contextualize the intrigue and significance of an exemplary scholar's work.

That being the case, Borgen's upbringing within and lifelong commitment to the Methodist Church—a minority and sometimes disparaged denomination by the state Church of Norway (Lutheran)—is significant for understanding his scholarship and contributions. Participating at the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1947 and beyond, as well as in ecumenical conversations in Norway and internationally, Peder Borgen always possessed and championed a larger vision of the larger body of Christ, served by its component parts but not limited to any of them. This gave rise to his challenging state-church approaches to Christian discipleship, calling for the following of Jesus as the first priority of authentic believers.

Indeed, with his being steeped in the New Testament writings, Christ being the head of the church is the center of ecclesial organization and concern, and that witness bore fruit in Norway and beyond. As Ernst Käsemann shared with me in personal correspondence nearly three decades ago, it was the lordship of Christ that also posed the biblical basis for the Barmen Declaration in 1934, and attending, discerning, and minding the leadership of Christ is the high calling of every Christian leader and movement.² Peder Borgen also served the church well with his pastoral and teaching work, and that vocation provided direction for his biblical studies, and vice versa.

As a biblical scholar, the exegetical work of Peder Borgen is also without parallel in the Scandanavian nations and beyond. Inspired by Nils Alstrup Dahl and other Scandanavian scholars, Borgen played a major role in wresting the socioreligious backdrop of the New Testament writings away from Continental infatuation with second-century Gnosticism, showing the pervasively Jewish character of the writings of John and Paul and other New Testament texts. In particular, the works of Philo and the Babylonian Talmud help one appreciate the ways Jesus and his ministry were engaged by contemporary Jewish leaders in Palestine, as well as among other settings

2. Correspondence with Professor Käsemann, 1994; see Paul N. Anderson, "John 17—The Original Intention of Jesus for the Church, a Foreword by Paul N. Anderson," in *The Testament of Jesus*, by Ernst Käsemann, translated by Gerhard Krodel, Johannine Monograph Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), xxxvi n. 76. See also my book *Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice* (Newberg, OR: Barclay, 2013).

in the larger Mediterranean world. Pivotal in his own development, and a subject to which he continually returned throughout his career, was the midrashic debate between Jesus and Jewish leaders in John 6.

Challenging the diachronic fragmentation of John 6 by Rudolf Bultmann, who inferred no fewer than four major and distinctive literary sources underlying John 6,³ Borgen was able to demonstrate compellingly the textual and thematic unity of the chapter. Like the proem text of a midrashic sermon, or a text-based argument by Philo, Borgen demonstrated the linguistic continuity and development of John 6:31–54 as a unity, arguing against a complex history of textual displacement, reordering, additions, and expansions upon alien documents posed by Rudolf Bultmann. In personal correspondence with me, he shared how he discovered the continuity of word patterns in Exodus 16:4 as played out within John 6, while passing time during a long wait in the Main Train Station of Copenhagen. He later found similar patterns in treatments of the manna motif in the writings of Philo, which led to further inquiry.⁴ The monumental significance of his *magnum opus* demonstrated the textual unity and Jewish character of the Fourth Gospel with considerable implications for understanding its origin, character, and development.

When I first came to Glasgow for my doctoral work, diving into top Johannine studies in investigating the Christology of the Fourth Gospel, my advisor, John Riches, assigned me to thoroughly engage the great commentaries of Rudolf Bultmann, Rudolf Schnackenburg, C. K. Barrett, Raymond Brown, Barnabas Lindars, and others, as well as to look into the works of Ernst Käsemann, John Ashton, J. Louis Martyn, Wayne Meeks, and others, including, of course, Peder Borgen. This was just after his hosting of SNTS at Trondheim, and his *Bread from Heaven* and other works were already making a stir, internationally. In my work on John 6, I followed Borgen's lead and spent several months looking up all the manna-related midrashim in Philo and the Babylonian Talmud. There, I concurred with his overall treatment of the motif (noting also Psalm 78:24–25 as a significant link, as well as Exodus 16:4), but found that in most of the cases (about 85 percent of them) manna references served as a secondary text—a “rhetorical trump card,” taking all hands—in the ways the motif was used. When applied to John 6,

3. For an extensive analysis of Bultmann's diachronic Johannine theory, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (WUNT 2.78, 1996; third printing, Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 33–169.

4. Paul N. Anderson, “Peder Borgen's *Bread from Heaven*—Midrashic Developments in John 6 as a Case Study in John's Unity and Disunity, a Foreword by Paul N. Anderson,” in Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Johannine Monograph Series 4 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), iii–iv.

this is what the crowd and the religious leaders argued: “What must we do to *get* the works of God (i.e., more bread—the main interest)?” bolstered by a reference to what Moses gave: manna from heaven (John 6:28–31). And, in my view, I would not be surprised if actual conversations and challenges like that (couched in the form of the Johannine temptation narrative) might have actually happened—a form of real-life midrashic debate—within the Capernaum synagogue. It could also have played well within a synagogue debate among the Gentile mission settings of Asia Minor or elsewhere.

Having met Professor Borgen at the 1987 Göttingen SNTS meetings, our paths crossed again at the 1993 University of Chicago SNTS meetings. This was the last year the Johannine Seminar was working on John 6, and Raymond Brown had withdrawn his paper, as he’d moved on to the Passion Narratives Seminar. This allowed me to offer a paper on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread-of-Life Discourse, accepted graciously by John Painter. In that expansive essay (twenty-eight thousand words), I attempted with John 6 what Lou Martyn had achieved with John 9, connecting the narrative with four additional audience-related issues, besides the Johannine-Jewish engagements.⁵ There I described the importance of Borgen’s work, while also noting the use of manna as secondary text. By then, Professor Borgen was taking leadership in the Philo Seminar, but he’d heard about my paper, and when we met up, he confronted me directly: “So, you’ve said my monograph on John 6 is the most important book on that chapter, and then you do everything you can do to dismantle my argument!” “Let’s talk,” I replied. We engaged a bit there, at the University of Chicago, and when we ran into each other at the Washington, DC, SBL meetings in November, we took our conversation further.

We agreed to meet in the lobby of the Washington Hilton, and we had a first-rate disciplinary debate over the use of manna rhetoric in Philo, the ancient midrashim, and John 6. Professor Borgen challenged: “What do you mean by ‘a rhetorical trump card’? That’s not a technical category used by biblical scholars.” I replied, “Yes, I’m aware of that; it’s a fitting term I’ve devised, describing the way manna is used—especially in Philo—where the highest trump card played takes all other cards in the hand.” (As a Methodist, of course, he might not have been familiar with card-playing terms. . . not that all Quakers would have understood it either.) As our engagement continued, discussing a variety of Jewish homiletical patterns used in Second Temple Judaism, Jacob Neusner—the leading authority on Jewish

5. Paul N. Anderson, “The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context,” in *Critical Readings of John 6*, edited by Alan Culpepper, Biblical Interpretation Supplemental Series 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1997; reprinted, Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 1–59.

interpretive texts—walked up and said, “Hello, Peder, how are you doing?” After they exchanged greetings, Peder introduced me to this scholar with whose works I was familiar. After saying hello, I said, “We’re so glad you showed up just now, Professor Neusner; we’ve been discussing whether or not there is one, primary homiletical pattern that was used in ancient midrashic debates.” He insisted, “Absolutely not! The only determining factor is the interpretive interest of the midrashist, serving his rhetorical purpose.” I turned to Professor Borgen and said, “See?” We both laughed and thanked Professor Neusner for his input.

My good engagement with Peder Borgen continued over the years, in constructive, friendly ways. He reviewed *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* when it was published three years later,⁶ and I invited him to contribute on aspects of historicity in John 5–9 at the 2010 SBL meetings, published later in the third central volume of the John, Jesus, and History Project.⁷ When Alan Culpepper and I envisioned the value of the Johannine Monograph Series over a decade ago, we led off with Bultmann’s commentary on John, including four other volumes following in its wake.⁸ These included the monographs of Moody Smith, Wayne Meeks, Peder Borgen, and Ernst Käsemann, each in their own ways furthering the interest of Nils Alstrup Dahl—Professor at Oslo and Yale—in showing the Jewish and ecclesial thrust of the Fourth Gospel against Bultmann’s Hellenistic and diachronic approach.

As I’ve edited the ninth volume overall emerging from the John, Jesus, and History Project, focusing on archaeology, John, and Jesus,⁹ Borgen’s important work continues to come to mind in relation to several of the essays. Given the Jerusalem temple links with the Migdal Synagogue stone and likely presence of Judean leaders in the Capernaum synagogue, Borgen’s midrashic analysis of John 6 indeed resembles the sort of midrashic debate that may actually have occurred in the region, following a feeding event and Passover messianic hopes of a political uprising associated with nationalistic

6. Peder Borgen, review of “The Christology of the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (October 1998) 751–58. See my response, Paul N. Anderson, “Epilogue: Responses to *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*,” *Christology* (2010), 347–49.

7. Peder Borgen, “Observations on God’s Agent and Agency in John 5–9: Tradition, Exposition, and Glimpses into History,” in *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 3, *Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, edited by Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, *Early Christianity and Its Literature* 18 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 423–38.

8. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Johannine Monograph Series 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

9. Paul N. Anderson, *Archaeology, John, and Jesus: What Recent Discoveries Show Us about Jesus from the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming, 2023).

typologies of Moses and Elijah.¹⁰ In that sense, Borgen's contribution bears considerable implications historically, in addition to addressing John's literary and theological riddles.¹¹

As Torrey Seland's expansive overview of Peder Borgen's life of biblical scholarship and Christian leadership documents, his additional contributions to Philonic and Pauline studies are also worth noting. I think it would be fair to say that Philonic New Testament studies would not have developed in the ways they did were it not for the lifelong contributions of Peder Borgen. Likewise, understandings of Paul's uses of Hebrew Scripture in Galatians and his other writings, and appreciation for John's autonomy over against the Gospels of Matthew and the other Synoptics, are likewise indebted to his numerous contributions over the years. For these and other reasons, Peder Borgen's membership and leadership as chair (1996–1999) within the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters—receiving also its Gunnerus Medal (2003), its highest honor, in appreciation for his rigorous academic work—is appreciated. It is also fitting that he was awarded Knight First Class of the Norwegian Order of Saint Olav by King Herald V, a royal tribute to his academic, biblical, ministerial, and ecumenical work. In addition to authoring no fewer than nine books and numerous peer-reviewed essays, the two Festschrifts gathered in his name represent but a small tribute to his work over the years by top biblical scholars internationally.¹² Not only has Peder Borgen crossed many borders in his international travels, but his work has also crossed borders between academic disciplines, between denominations, between church and state, and between academic and general audiences. He is truly a royally distinguished biblical scholar, and Torrey Seland is to be thanked for this monumental contribution covering the life and scholarship of Peder Borgen.

10. D. Moody Smith, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel*, Johannine Monograph Series 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Johannine Monograph Series 4 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, Johannine Monograph Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, Johannine Monograph Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

11. Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011).

12. *Context: Essays in Honor of Peder Borgen*, edited by Peter Wilhelm Böckman and Roald E. Kristiansen (Trondheim: Tapir, 1987); *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, edited by D. E. Aune, T. Seland, and J. H. Ulrichsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003).