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Akala's "The Son-Father relationship and Christological symbolism in the Gospel of John" (Book Review)

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Akala, A. J. (2014). *The Son-Father relationship and Christological symbolism in the Gospel of John*. NY: Bloombury T&T Clark. 248 pp. \$112.00 (Hardback); \$39.95 (Paperback). ISBN 9780567374141

An offering from the Library of New Testament Studies (LNTS) (Formerly Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series and part of the International Studies on Christian Origins), Akala's work explores the Father-Son Relationship (SFR) as being "at the center of the symbolic network in the Gospel of John" (p. xv). Akala (PhD, Asbury Theological Seminary) has deep and thorough footnotes throughout this publication of a dissertation. It is very readable, and could be used by undergraduates as well as informing graduate studies. The author does assume a reading level of Greek (like the *Word* commentaries do), and words are sometimes in Greek and not translated for the uninitiated.

Akala wrestles with the figurative blurriness and variety of interpretation symbols and their scholarly interpretation can have. Symbols are hard to define, even what a symbol is, often is subject to definitional wrangling among scholars. The author works to uncover underlying figurative structure and examine strands of figuration. John's focus is on Jesus as the Son of God. The symbolic network points to Jesus as the Son of God and Akala examines symbolic clusters, explicates symbolic structures and examines form and function. The gap of time and cultural change gaps between scholars and apostolic writings. Akala illumines that symbol represents revelation, that it is a transcendent revelation vehicle. It reveals socio-cultural environments and underlying philosophies.

Akala rejects the lynchpin of one particular symbol as an overarching guide, stating that "practically every Christological Symbol points to Jesus; thus the identification of one symbol as the center of John's symbolic structure is moot" (p. 15). The author continues that, "Jesus the Son, who identifies himself primarily through his relationship with God the Father, *is the center* of John's symbolic world. Hence, this study identifies the SFR as the center of John's symbolic world" (p. 16, emphasis in original). The author concludes that "Johannine symbols should, therefore, be understood as *theoretical and theological constructs that contain hermeneutical keys to interpreting the Gospel*" (pp. 18-19, emphasis in original).

Akala charts the Gospel's "symbolic network" which is "John's Christological Symbolology" (p. xv). Akala explores theories of symbol in general, the theory of Johannine symbolism, as well as narrative and symbolism in the Gospel of John. The author then introduces semantic methodology of symbol and narrative theories to produce a theological synthesis of the Prologue (1:1-18) and Prayer (17:1-26) in

John's Gospel. "The Prologue is widely recognized by scholars as a thematic and theological preview to the Johannine narrative" (p. 146). Akala then unpacks the whole Gospel using this framework in "seventeen sequences, following the plot of the Johannine narrative; each sequence consists of a synopsis and symbograph" (193). Akala's work reveals the Son-Father relationship as the "common denominator" (p. 212) for the theological and symbolic understanding of John's Gospel. "In the Gospel of John, theology is symbolical and symbolism is theological" and they work in "reciprocal relationship" in "revelation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God the Father" (p. 216).

Recommended for libraries needing new scholarship in the Gospel of John or more on the Son-Father Relationship (SFR).

Reviewer

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Truesday, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Square peg: Why Wesleyans aren't fundamentalists*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. 158 pp. \$15.99. ISBN 9780834127937

Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists is written by leading Nazarenes, mostly with doctorates, is published by a Nazarene Press, and provides further evidence that the Church of the Nazarene continues to struggle with fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes, especially with their average church members, despite claiming to be Wesleyan. This book continues the tracking of this issue begun by Paul Bassett in 1978 in an article titled, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940: The Church of the Nazarene: A Case Study," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 65-91, and later followed by Stan Ingersol's "Strange Bedfellows: Nazarenes and Fundamentalism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 123-41.

There is no doubt that Nazarenes have often taken pride in being conservative in many ways, especially emphasizing holy living, often with an emphasis on what one should not do, a tendency rife in fundamentalism. Christian historian George Marsden classified the holiness movement in the fundamentalist camp because there was so much evidence that that was the case (p. 63).

That said, the well-known Nazarene authors of this volume argue persuasively that they are very different from fundamentalists and for very fundamental reasons. Floyd T. Cunningham, professor of history of Christianity and president of Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, quotes well-known and well-respected