requires more extensive argumentation to be credible. The weakness of this final argument does not, however, detract from the value of Kim has done in analyzing and responding to the hypothesis that Luke and Paul advocated opposition against the Roman Empire. This book will be useful to anyone interested in what the NT has to say about political involvement by Christians and the church.

Andrews University


Many theologies of John have approached the book from a variety of directions. Typically scholars approach the Fourth Gospel in terms of its relation to the OT or other ancient sources. Others approach the book in terms of the Greco-Roman context or of proposed earlier stages in the development of the Gospel. Without disparaging these other approaches, Koester chooses to limit himself to careful attention to the text of John as we have it.

According to Koester, to read the Gospel of John theologically is to ask a series of questions: “Who is the God about whom Jesus speaks? Who does the Gospel say that Jesus is? And how does the Gospel understand life, death, sin, and faith?” Koester finds these issues coming up again and again in the narrative of John's Gospel, each time disclosing a fresh dimension of these themes. He believes, therefore, that the best approach to a theology of the Gospel of John is to draw on the Gospel as a whole.

Koester, however, does not limit himself to the theological language of the Gospel’s author. Instead, he approaches John's theology primarily on the basis of classical categories such as God, Christ, humanity, sin, Spirit, and faith. However, he breaks down each of these using categories drawn from the Gospel itself, such as word, light, life, flesh, world, truth, and witness. This unusual intersection of John's language and classical themes, is, however, extremely successful, in my opinion. The outcome is by far the most fruitful and interesting theology of John I have read.

The book is elegantly written, a model of clarity and organization. I don't mean to suggest that the book is light reading. It is not. But Koester has thought deeply about recognizable themes in the Gospel and has brought fresh wording and insight to bear on them. In the process, he has a knack for contemporary analogies that clarify inner connections within the Gospel without oversimplifying. To put it in other words, the more you know about the Fourth Gospel, the more you will appreciate this book.
Koester repeatedly illuminates connections and themes in this book in a way that made me marvel that I had not seen things that way before. You could say he points out the obvious, except the obvious wasn’t obvious before he pointed it out. Biblical theology doesn’t get any better than this. If there is a weakness in the book, it is that Koester’s elegant language packs so much into so few words that a quick reading of this book is not possible. Genuine engagement with the book requires line-by-line thoughtfulness and analysis.

The power of Koester’s language is better experienced than described. “The prologue takes readers to an elevated vantage point, where they can see things that those confined to the flat plain below cannot see.” (98) “If people are created for life, they will seek whatever they think will bring it. The issue is not whether people will seek life—that is a given. The issue is where their pursuit of life will take them and where their faith will be centered” (171). In context these statements are even more powerful than they are in isolation.

Let me summarize the flow of the book as a whole. After a short introduction to the Fourth Gospel and the history of its theological interpretation, Koester offers a chapter on the theme of God in John’s Gospel. The purpose of the Gospel is to make God known through the story of Jesus. The next chapter focuses on the world and its people. The people in John ask who Jesus is, but their encounters with Jesus also disclose who they are.

The fourth chapter focuses on the identity of Jesus, brought out in a series of stages. After a chapter on the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which he reemphasizes the holistic nature of humanity, the sixth chapter explores the Spirit in the Gospel of John. It is the Spirit that provides a real sense of the risen Christ and his Father to the believing community. Therefore, wherever someone comes to know the risen Christ, it is evident that the Spirit of God is at work. The seventh and best chapter is on faith; I will have more to say about that chapter below. Finally, the eighth chapter is on discipleship. The life of Jesus’ disciple is not so much bound up with abstract teachings as with a living relationship with Jesus. Disciples are to observe what Jesus does, and that is the norm for how they are to treat others.

This book is far too insightful to effectively review in a couple of pages. A longer version of this review is on the web site www.thebattleofarageddon.com. Here I would like to highlight two of the many helpful themes of the book. The first is Koester’s position on the human condition in death. According to Koester, John does not work with a dualistic view in which people have an immortal soul that can be separated from the mortal body. In death the whole person dies. He summarizes the Gospel’s position with the provocative statement, “Someone who falls asleep can remain in the care of someone else until he or she is awakened” (182).

In my opinion, the very best part of the book is the first half of the chapter on faith (163-174). While firmly grounded in the text and setting of the entire Gospel, Koester offers the clearest explanation of how faith works and the practical struggle for faith in today’s world that I have ever read. This part of the book brilliantly blurs the line between scholarship and devotional writing, along the lines of Richard Hays or N. T. Wright.
Koester correctly points out that everyone sees the miraculous “signs” in the Gospel from a different point of view. Characters in the Gospel respond positively to Jesus’ signs if they have already been brought to faith through the words from or about Jesus. It is the words that bring faith, not the “signs.” The signs can only confirm faith. Readers who live after the resurrection of Jesus cannot see the actions of the earthly Jesus. Yet they have what is essential. They have received the words from and about Jesus through the Gospel. They need not look elsewhere for wonders to believe in. John’s text has all the works and words that they need to come to faith.

For John, then, faith is the context in which genuine understanding develops. Those who show an initial trust in Jesus do not have all their questions answered at the outset. They come to understand Jesus as they follow him. So if faith is the context in which understanding develops, relationship with a Jesus we cannot see can begin in the absence of understanding. It is triggered by the words and works of Jesus and acted upon by his surrogate, the Holy Spirit. To those of a modernistic worldview, Koester’s outline of faith in John’s Gospel may seem naive in a scientific world. But a younger, postmodern generation will find the stories of the Gospel fertile ground for faith.

As one who has written a couple of books on the Gospel of John, I find Koester’s scholarship impeccable. As one who loves to blur the line between scholarship and popular devotional writing, I was deeply nourished by this book. For those who appreciate the combination of great scholarship and great writing, this book will be a challenging read but an extremely rewarding one.

Loma Linda University
Loma Linda, California


*Seventh-day Adventists and the Civil Rights Movement* by Samuel London is a pioneering work in Adventist scholarship. It is the first study, that I am aware of, that provides an in-depth analysis of Seventh-day Adventist participation in the Civil Rights Movement. The writer explores how Adventist theology, especially its eschatological vision and ecclesiology, influenced the way its members responded to sociopolitical activism. He explains why the church leadership advocated nonparticipation, but why some members became involved anyway.

London points out that there is a dearth of literature that deals with Adventist political involvement; however, three works are worth mentioning that could be considered part of this dialogue: Holly Fishers, “Oakwood’s College Student Quest for Social Justice Before and During the Civil Rights Era” (*Journal of African History* 2003, 88); James Kyle Jr., “SDAs and the Civil Rights Movement: The First Decade” (unpublished, 1977); and Roger Dudley and Edwin Hernandez, “Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics among American Seventh-day Adventists” (*Andrews University Press*, 1992).