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978-0-521-47765-9 - John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel

Mark W. G. Stibbe

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This study constitutes an interesting literary-critical investigation of the fourth gospel, and examines the artistic achievement of the evangelist in redescribing his story in a creative and poetic way. The book is divided into two parts. Part I is concerned with constructing a theory of narrative criticism appropriate for research on the gospel. Part II puts this theory into practice, and concentrates on John 18–19 in order to show how literary and historical methodologies can be combined to suggest a new, holistic approach to gospel literature.

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John as storyteller

Narrative criticism and the fourth gospel

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To my father

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PREFACE

This book has something of a rich history. My interest in literary and narrative criticism goes back to the period between 1979 and 1982 when I studied English Literature for my first degree at Cambridge University. During the three years of the course, I attempted to construct a Christian approach to literature. These three years were instrumental in providing me with a foundational understanding of literary theory, and in helping me to gain experience in the whole area of interdisciplinary studies. I am particularly grateful to my Roman Catholic friend and supervisor, Dr Eric Griffiths, for the acuteness of his expert tuition.

After a spell of teaching English and RE, I started my training for the ordained ministry in the Church of England at St John's College, Nottingham. There I did a shortened second degree in biblical studies. It was here that I started working on a new angle of my interdisciplinary methodology. Having studied literature from a biblical perspective at Cambridge University, I now started studying the Bible from a literary perspective at Nottingham University. I am deeply indebted to my dear friend Dr Andrew Lincoln for his teaching and support through these three years. Dr Lincoln was one of the very few biblical scholars in Great Britain interested in looking at the New Testament from a literary-critical perspective. Studying under him at this stage was indeed providential.

After being ordained deacon, I started a challenging job as a curate in Nottingham. It was during this four-year curacy that I completed my part-time doctoral dissertation entitled 'The Artistry of John'. I am thankful to a number of people who supported me as I burnt the candle at both ends during this difficult time. First of all, I owe a debt of thanks to Dr John Muddimann, who supervised me for my Ph.D. with exemplary erudition and sensitivity. Secondly, I am grateful to the Rev. Charles Hall, my vicar, who encouraged me in my biblical studies. Thirdly, I am for ever in the debt of my wife

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Alie, and our children Philip and Hannah, who had to put up with me working on 'The Artistry of John' on rare days off and holidays.

Since the completion of the thesis, I have received warm and perceptive comments from Professor Graham Stanton, my external examiner, and Robert Morgan. Both have helped me considerably in preparing the thesis for publication, very aptly, with the Cambridge University Press.

This book, finally, is dedicated to my father, Philip Stibbe. It was he who introduced me to literature as something to love. I cannot put into words the debt I owe to him.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this book, I have used Raymond Brown's excellent translation of the fourth gospel, which the reader can find in Brown's Anchor Bible Commentary on *The Gospel According to John*. I have also referred throughout my book to *The Greek New Testament* edited by Kurt Eland et al. (third edition, 1975). References to Euripides' *Bacchae* are made using the Penguin Classics translation of the play by Philip Vellacott (1975 version).

Finally, I am grateful to the SCM for allowing me to reproduce some of the material I used for their *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, 1990). Some of the material in chapter 2 appeared in my section on Structuralism in that volume (650–5).