

ADUMBRATIONS OF ATONEMENT THEOLOGY IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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In 1974, J. Terence Forestell published his doctoral dissertation, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*,¹ defended at the Pontifical Biblical Commission in May 1970. Its thesis is clear from the subtitle: “Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel.” The theology of the cross in the Gospel of John is presented not as expiation, as vicarious satisfaction, but as revelation by which God in Christ draws people to himself. Forestell has no difficulty demonstrating how central the theme of revelation is in the Fourth Gospel. After all, this is the Gospel in which Jesus prays, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world” (17:6)—a theme constantly recurring. Then he develops several ways in which John treats the cross. The elevation of the Son of Man, focusing on the *ὁψώω* terminology familiar to all of us, is the revelatory means by which Jesus discloses himself. The theme of the glorification of Jesus, especially from John 12 on, is tightly tied to the cross, which placards Jesus in such a way that he draws people to himself—surely an act of self-disclosure, of revelation. Forestell works through a variety of passages that have traditionally been associated with vicarious atonement to argue that, *provided one does not introduce from elsewhere the ideas of expiation and substitution to the texts*, in John’s Gospel they have very little to do with such themes, but cluster around the theme of revelation. Forestell then works out this thesis with respect to other Johannine themes—e.g. faith, eternal life, birth from above, eschatology, the Holy Spirit, and sacraments. For example, if Jesus is likened to the bronze serpent lifted up on a pole in the wilderness (John 3:14–15; Num 21:4–9), Jesus is no more a substitution for something than the bronze serpent is. Rather, in both cases the people are exhorted to put their faith in the saving object of faith that God has graciously provided, that God has graciously revealed.

It is vital to be clear on what Forestell is arguing. He is not saying that there is no theology of the cross in John. Like the other canonical Gospels, the Fourth Gospel rushes toward the passion: that is a non-negotiable component of what the gospel is, including the Gospel according to John. Rather, he is saying that the theology of the cross in John is displayed not in some theory of vicarious sacrifice but in the theme of revelation.

Though few follow Forestell all the way, his book has been remarkably influential in shaping the way many scholars have talked about the cross in John. This

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¹ J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 57; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974).

essay mounts some methodological and exegetical reservations to Forestell's thesis.²

I. READING JOHN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

Students of the Gospels soon learn that careful exegesis of, say, the Synoptics, means that one must be careful not to read what Matthew says into Mark, or the reverse. In other words, there is a danger of reading the content of one Gospel into another, thereby flattening all of them, making ourselves unable to hear the distinctive notes of Matthean, Markan, and Lukan theologies. The same applies all the more, *mutatis mutandis*, to John's Gospel. John does not have any text quite like, say, Mark 10:45 (=Matt 20:28), so to understand John's thought aright it is important not to import what we have learned from other Gospels into the Gospel we are studying. The disciplines of form and redaction criticism reified this simple point into distinctive communities: for several decades NT scholars have worked within an array of assumptions about the Matthean community, the Johannine community, and so forth. Some of the great studies of John's Gospel within the last half-century were developed within this framework. For instance, one thinks of C. H. Dodd's magisterial *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*³ and of Raymond Brown's lifelong recreation of the history of the Johannine community.⁴ There are, of course, many other examples. The recent massive volumes by Urban von Wahlde rely not only on updated source criticism, largely founded on *Sachkritik*, to establish his recreation of the stages of the Johannine community, but also, much of the time, on the assumption of hermetically sealed communities. For good or ill, all of this was achieved by resolutely refusing to allow anything in the Johannine corpus to be read in the light of other NT documents unless there is convincing evidence of direct dependence. That *modus operandi* resulted in an entire cottage industry of works proving or disproving John's dependence on, say, Luke, or Mark.

At some level, it is surely the part of wisdom not to assume common theological commitments across the canonical Gospels unless there is evidence to support the existence of such sharing. The price paid for failing to observe this discipline is, as I have indicated, a flattening of NT texts.

On the other hand, in the last fifteen years another line of thought has shaken up this paradigm. Richard Bauckham and company have argued, rather convincingly, that the four canonical Gospels were *not* written for separate, hermetically sealed-off communities, but for *all* Christians.⁵ Whether one accepts all the details

² For an earlier assessment of Forestell along similar lines, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 76–80.

³ C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963).

⁴ One thinks not only of his Anchor Bible commentaries on John and the Johannine Epistles, but also his *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

⁵ Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

of their argument, and whether one agrees that John's Gospel was written for Christians as opposed to non-Christian Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers in the *diaspora* (as I suppose), the impact of this line of thought is substantial. We should be far more skeptical than we are about the existence of Matthean, Markan, Lukan, and Johannine communities (let alone about our ability to define them very precisely); we should accept that the canonical Gospels circulated and were read more widely than is often supposed; and we should not require solid evidence of direct literary dependence before allowing the possibility of shared awareness of common Christian beliefs. None of this absolves us from the responsibility carefully to avoid flattening the demonstrable distinctives of each Gospel, but it does mandate a balancing responsibility to avoid reductionistic exegesis. We simply cannot responsibly avoid living with this conceptual and methodological tension.

The significance of this initial step in my argument will shortly become apparent.

II. SOME CRUCIAL PASSAGES

1. *John 2:19*. John 2:19 finds Jesus declaring, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Forestell barely mentions this verse.⁶ Jesus' words are an outworking of what is already anticipated in the Prologue: Jesus is the true tabernacle (1:14, ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). The tabernacle/temple was the place where God met with his people. It signified God's presence, established through the God-ordained sacrifices that were offered there. If we were left with John 1:14 only, we might infer that Jesus constitutes the true tabernacle/temple by virtue of his incarnation alone: the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. But John 2:19 shifts the focus: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." In other words, Jesus is constituted the temple, the place where sinners meet with God and God makes his presence known, not by virtue of the incarnation alone *but by virtue of his death and resurrection*. Tying Jesus' death and resurrection to the temple and its destruction and replacement associates the cross with sacrifice and expiation for anyone familiar with OT and early Christian thought.⁷

2. *John 6*. In John 6, Jesus speaks quite shockingly of the need to eat his flesh and drink his blood if people are to have eternal life (6:51 and surrounding passages). Forestell argues that this bread of life discourse is set in the context of the feeding of the five thousand, making the bread a kind of metaphor for Jesus' teaching.⁸ The word Jesus speaks has life, and it is received in faith. Forestell adds:

We believe that the original "bread of life" discourse was expanded in eucharistic terms, not in order to substitute sacrament for word as the means to eternal life, but in order to show contemporary Christians that it was in the eucharistic

⁶ *Word of the Cross* 60, 92.

⁷ Something similar takes place in 1 John. On the face of it, the prologue to 1 John emphasizes the incarnation (cast in terms of the life being manifested, rather than the Word becoming flesh), and indeed the "truth test" focuses on Jesus the man being the Messiah, the Son of God. Nevertheless this focus on incarnation drives firmly toward propitiatory sacrifice (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

⁸ *Word of the Cross* 142.

worship of the Church that their faith in the word of God revealed in Jesus now found expression. The same faith that was asked of the disciples in Jesus elevated upon the cross is now asked of the Christian in the celebration of the Eucharist. ... It is in the Eucharist that the Christian now encounters the self-revelation of Jesus and his love.⁹

Certainly it is true that most contemporary scholars find in John 6:51–59 a thoroughly anachronistic allusion to the Eucharist. Yet if this argument is nuanced a little, a rather different picture emerges, one that gently questions Forestell's thesis.

We must not forget that Jesus' words in John 6 are set within the context of the historical Jesus. Surely it is important to make sense of them within that context before we establish more extended contexts. That first-century setting is rural and agricultural. Ask any urban child today where food comes from, and they will say, "From the grocery store." But any child brought up on a farm will know to say, "From plants and animals." Eat a hamburger and you are eating dead cow, dead wheat, dead tomatoes, dead lettuce, and so forth. Everything you eat has died, except for a few minerals like salt. The child from an agricultural background, whether first century or twenty-first century, knows that if you don't eat dead things, you die. Either the cow and the lettuce and the bread die so that you can live, or you die. Their life is sacrificed so that you escape death. Moreover, in first-century Israel, bread was one of only two staples: again, eat bread or die. In the same way, either Jesus dies and we live, or he does not die and we do. We must eat his flesh and drink his blood if we are to enjoy his eternal life, or we cannot live. His death is substituted for our death. The way the extended metaphor of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood remains powerful while avoiding any hint of cannibalism turns on the power of first-century assumptions about food. The various other affirmations in this chapter—e.g. Jesus gives his flesh for the life of the world (6:51), those who feed on him live because of him (6:57), and all this demonstrates that Jesus is the true manna from heaven (6:58)—turn on this analogy between physical food losing its life for our sake, and Jesus doing so.

By the time this was written, of course,¹⁰ after Christians had had several decades of experiencing the Lord's Supper, it would be difficult for Christians and for those who observed them not to overhear in these words some kind of echo of Eucharistic formulae. That this is not their *primary* significance is indicated not only by the setting in which John places these words, but also by an array of details: e.g. Jesus says "flesh" and blood, not *body* and blood, which is used in every Eucharistic expression that has come down to us in the first century and the beginning of the second century. The upshot of this discussion is that Jesus' words in John 6 conjure up substitution: his death for ours, his life for ours. At the same time they carry overtones that with time would call to mind the Eucharist, and thus underscore that sacrifice to which the Eucharist points. All of this goes considerably farther than the reductionism of a focus on revelation alone.

⁹ Ibid. 144.

¹⁰ In my view, in the 80s—but the precise date makes little difference to my argument.

3. *John 10*. In John 10, Jesus asserts that as the good shepherd he gives his life for his sheep. When Forestell treats this passage, he focuses almost all his attention on 10:15: τὴν ψυχὴν μου τίθημι ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων. “Since many commentators introduce the notion of vicarious and expiatory sacrifice into the Johannine theology on the basis of this expression,” he warns, “the terms should be carefully examined in the light of the context in which they appear.”¹¹ Forestell explains:

The parable of the good shepherd determines the meaning of the expression in Jn 10. The true shepherd as distinct from the hired man is ready to expose his own life to save his sheep from the deprivations [*sic*] of wild beasts. This is clearly an act of self-devotion on the part of the shepherd proceeding from love for his sheep; it has no specifically religious, sacrificial or expiatory value. The shepherd does substitute his life for the life of the sheep, but this action is not performed out of any religious necessity; it is not an act of cult. Such interpretation would force the text beyond the purpose of the parable. ... This may be called sacrificial love in a wide sense, but it is not a cultic nor an expiatory act. ... In the context of the entire gospel Jesus’ death is a revelation to men that God loves them with the self-devotion of the good shepherd.¹²

But this reading of John 10 is too thin. Jesus does not merely “expose his own life to save his sheep from the deprivations [*sic*] of wild beasts,” as Forestell puts it, but actually gives his life for his sheep. The analogy with the shepherd is soon eclipsed: Jesus does not simply expose himself to danger, but he *lays down* his life, “only to take it up again” (10:17). Indeed, this is why his Father loves him (10:17). “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (10:18)—which is not the sort of thing an ordinary shepherd could say. Imagine: “No lion takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”; the notion is preposterous, showing how far beyond the experience of the ordinary shepherd the language is reaching. Indeed, Jesus has the authority to lay down his life by the command of his Father (10:18). So in John 10, by the plan and command of God, Jesus lays down his life, of his own volition, so that his sheep may live. If he does not die, they will. Enough of the extended shepherd/sheep metaphor is retained that of course there is no overtly cultic terminology, but there is certainly vicarious substitution by the plan of God.

4. *John 11*. In John 11, some men in the Sanhedrin, upset by Jesus’ popularity in the wake of his raising of Lazarus from the dead, complain, “If we let [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation” (11:48). In other words, what they fear is the utter destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. The intervention of Caiaphas proposes a substitution: “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (11:50). John the evangelist comments, “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring

¹¹ *Word of the Cross* 74.

¹² *Ibid.* 74, 76.

them together and make them one" (11:51–52). Forestell comments: "The phrase ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ of itself does not tell how Jesus' death benefited the people of God. The evangelist, however, tells us that it achieved this effect by drawing together the children of God scattered throughout the world. The attractive power of the cross spoken of in 12:32 seems to be in his mind."¹³ But this reasoning rather badly confuses what the text actually says about Jesus' death with what the text actually says was one of the results of Jesus' death. What cannot be avoided is that what Caiaphas, in the name of *Realpolitik*, wants is a *substitute* death: Jesus' death instead of the nation's death, morality be damned. The evangelist does not contradict this idea. Rather, far from disagreeing, he argues that the substitution will be far more sweeping than what Caiaphas had in mind.

5. *John 12*. In John 12, in a passage far too complex to be sorted out here, Jesus links Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6. The common focus John underscores is the skepticism of the people: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" from the former and "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts" from the latter (John 12:38, 40). Yet if one gives any credence to the view that in many passages where the NT cites the OT, the OT context is presupposed (and I do), one cannot easily forget how often in the NT Isaiah 53, with all of its profound substitutionary and atoning imagery, is linked with Jesus' death.

6. *John 13*. In the footwashing episode in John 13, Jesus responds to Peter's protests with the words, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (13:8). Most commentators, rightly, perceive a link between the footwashing and the cross: the cross cleans us up. The same reality is asserted by the more extensive use of cleaning terminology in the ensuing verses: "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean" (13:10). It is difficult to understand exactly how Jesus' cross-work cleans up sinners by simply revealing him to them, without that cross-work accomplishing something more. I shall return to this point shortly.

7. *John 1:29*. But without doubt the most important passage in John's Gospel on this subject, and the one that Forestell himself acknowledges to be the greatest challenge to his thesis, is John 1:29: John the Baptist points to Jesus with the words, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," substantially repeated in 1:36. Forestell admits that the terminology does in fact "suggest a sacrificial victim. Moreover, since the removal of sin is attributed directly to this lamb of God, we are immediately reminded either of the satisfactory work of the suffering servant of Yahweh or the expiatory power of blood in sacrifices for sin."¹⁴ Forestell canvasses a fair bit of scholarly opinion, rightly observing, for instance, that the verb for "takes away" sin (αἱρῶ) is not usually associated with the theme of atonement. The meaning of the passage remains a bit unstable, restless. Nevertheless

¹³ Ibid. 82.

¹⁴ Ibid. 194.

Forestell frankly concedes that some sort of atonement seems to be in view, but protests,

The text is unique in the gospel and its interpretation a matter of disagreement among scholars. . . . We feel that the Greek formula ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is intended in the sacrificial sense and that reference is being made to a cultic interpretation of Jesus' death in the liturgical practice of the Johannine community. We insist, however, that this interpretation is secondary with reference to the Johannine theology. One isolated and disputed text is not sufficient to overthrow a point of view which otherwise pervades the entire Gospel.¹⁵

Observe how Forestell assigns this admittedly sacrificial language to “the liturgical practice of the Johannine community,” by which he means that in any case it cannot be made to fit into the historical context John the evangelist assigns it. That is the overwhelming consensus of contemporary Johannine scholars, grounded not least in the fact that there is ample evidence that before he was beheaded the historical John the Baptist never entertained very clear notions of Jesus' death and its significance (see especially Matt 11:2–15 par.). In other words, Forestell acknowledges that John 1:29 is difficult for his thesis, but its meaning is obscure, anachronistic, and at best atypical of Johannine theology.

But another interpretation of John 1:29 refocuses the issue somewhat. Several have observed that Second Temple Judaism sometimes spoke, rather confusingly, of a warrior lamb. God's people may be likened to a weak lamb, sheep sent to the slaughter, but one day this lamb will be a warrior. I suspect that that is what John the Baptist has in mind, and that is why the Greek verb for “takes away” (*sin*) is not the usual one in atonement contexts. Jesus is the apocalyptic warrior lamb—and he will take away sin, sure enough. But John the evangelist, in line with his capacity to point out how people can speak better than they know (witness Caiaphas in John 11), believes that John the Baptist is also speaking better than he knows: Jesus is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away sin, but in a manner wholly unexpected by one who expected that the Messiah would come with thundering judgment (e.g. Matt 3:9–12). Confirmation of this view becomes pretty strong if we hold that John the seer, the writer of the Apocalypse, is none other than John the evangelist. For then we cannot overlook the fact that in the glorious vision of Revelation 4–5 the only one who can bring about God's purposes in judgment and redemption by taking the scroll from God's right hand and opening its seals is the Lion/Lamb—and that Lamb is simultaneously a slaughtered, sacrificial Lamb, and one with seven horns, symbolizing the perfection of all kingly authority. John the evangelist, I submit, knew all this, and that is why he believed that John the Baptist spoke better than he knew.

If this is the correct interpretation of John 1:29, however, then we are forced to conclude that John the evangelist introduced, rather subtly, the theme of vicarious substitution as atonement for sin at the very beginning of his Gospel. That ought to have a shaping effect on the way we read the rest of the Gospel.

¹⁵ Ibid. 194.

Moreover, however one resolves the complex calendrical debates as to whether Jesus is presented in John as dying during the time that the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple precincts, few doubt the thematic connection between Jesus and the Passover lamb. And it is the blood of the Passover lamb, appropriately applied to the door posts and lintel, that guarantees that the firstborn is spared from the destroying angel. The lamb dies, and the son lives; if the lamb does not die, the son does. Once again there is a kind of substitution.

III. WHY ADUMBRATIONS?

More precisely, why does the title of this piece specify “*Adumbrations of Atonement Theology in the Fourth Gospel*”? While Forestell seriously underplays what the cross in John’s Gospel accomplishes, we must be careful not to overplay exactly how much is said. Again and again, we have seen that the relevant passages portray a substitutionary death. In John 6, for instance, Jesus dies as the bread of God so that others may live. In John 10, Jesus the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep; in John 11, Jesus’ death substitutes for that of his people. There is nothing here that spells out how this substitute death *works*, how it accomplishes what it accomplishes, akin to Paul’s argument in Rom 3:21–26 and 2 Cor 5:11–21, or akin to the argument of Hebrews 9. But that is because, in all four canonical Gospels, the centrality and significance of the cross are progressively revealed. At Caesarea Philippi, for example, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, but he still has no category for a crucified and risen Messiah (Matthew 16 par.).

In other words, the evangelists are true to the history. Writing when they do, decades after the events, they well understand what the cross achieved, but they are careful not to read back into the events of the years of Jesus’ earthly ministry a greater understanding by the first witnesses of what was playing out before their eyes than what they actually enjoyed at the time. Elsewhere I have tried to depict this reality in sixteen or seventeen “misunderstanding” passages in John’s Gospel.¹⁶ More than a dozen times, John points out what the first disciples did *not* understand during the days of Jesus’ public ministry, and what they came to understand only later (e.g. John 2:19–22; 20:9). That means that the fourth evangelist is both able and intentionally willing to distinguish between what was understood “back then” (during the days of Jesus’ flesh) and what was understood only now (in the days of John’s writing, decades later). This is one of the great underplayed realities in contemporary scholarship on the Gospels. It stands among the strongest lines of evidence that John (in this case) did *not* blur the line between what was understood earlier and what was understood later. The assumption that he *did* blur the line is what authorizes so many contemporary authors to read the Gospels anachronistically, as if they are primarily saying something about the theology of the church *rather than* what Jesus himself taught. Though he uses somewhat different categories,

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, “Understanding Misunderstandings in the Fourth Gospel,” *TynBul* 33 (1982) 59–89.

something similar could be said about Matthew¹⁷ and the other evangelists. John's treatment of Jesus' cross fits right into this pattern. Throughout his Gospel, he provides *adumbrations* of the atoning significance of the cross. He greatly stresses the theme of substitution, for instance; he prepares the way for people to see that Jesus the warrior/sacrificial Lamb is simultaneously conquering king and suffering servant; he dies so that others may live. But he is careful not to betray the historical setting with anachronistic depth.

IV. THREE FURTHER REFLECTIONS

(1) If John had presented the cross as exclusively or almost exclusively focused on merely revealing Christ without in any sense paying for sin or substituting his death for the death of sinners, one might have expected his portrayal of human need to "fit" this revelation. In other words, human sin would then be pictured as ignorance or blindness that can be eliminated only by revelation. And, indeed, John does play with such themes (e.g. John 9). The interesting thing, however, is that John casts sin in many hues. It is his sin that causes the man of John 5 to be paralyzed for thirty-eight years: sin may cause physical ailments. Jesus testifies that the world is evil (7:5; cf. 3:19–21), not merely benighted. People die in their sins (8:24); if one commits any sin, one is a slave to sin (8:34). Sins include lying and murder (8:44) and hate (15:18), as well as unbelief and disobedience (3:36). When the Paraclete comes, he convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11). Can such multifaceted sin be met by revelation and nothing more?

(2) What precisely, in Forestell's mind, does Jesus actually reveal in the cross? Forestell speaks repeatedly of the revelation of Jesus' devotion to his people or of God's love for them. For instance, he writes (as we have seen), "Jesus' death is a revelation to men that God loves them with the self-devotion of the good shepherd."¹⁸ But one remembers the well-known riposte of James Denney a century ago to similar claims in the heyday of old-fashioned liberalism. How does the cross of Jesus reveal the love of God, if it does not accomplish anything? It is like a man running down the Brighton pier at full tilt, crying out, "World! World! I love you. And I'll prove it!"—whereupon he jumps into the sea and drowns. How does this prove he loves the world? Most of us would conclude that it proves he is insane. In other words, Forestell's interpretation of the significance of the cross in John is not sufficiently content-ful, not sufficiently robust, to be meaningful. Like old-fashioned liberalism, it is an inherently unstable position.

(3) Forestell devotes one chapter to 1 John, because, under the assumption of common authorship with the Fourth Gospel, it may testify to what John the evangelist thought about these matters. There is not space here to tease out and evaluate Forestell's treatment, except to observe that when he comes to *ἰλασμός* in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10, his strongest reflection is that "its meaning is not at all certain," be-

¹⁷ Cf. D. A. Carson, "Christological Ambiguities in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology* (ed. Harold H. Rowdon; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1982) 97–114.

¹⁸ *Word of the Cross* 76.

fore trying to subsume it under the Advocate language of the preceding lines, making Jesus' death have some sort of intercessory power with God, like the death of the Jewish martyrs. This will strike most of us, I think, as simultaneously tendentious and reductionistic.

V. CONCLUSION

Put into a slightly different framework, Forestell's work retains considerable value. His thesis would have been enlightening and refreshing if he had pointed out how often in John's Gospel Jesus' death is portrayed as being a major component in Jesus' self-disclosure. The theme of revelation is richly prevalent and highly evocative. It is precisely in the atoning death of Christ that God has revealed himself to us. The cross and resurrection are the climactic self-disclosures of God, not because they hang there naked at the end of history to serve as self-disclosures of nothing but the vaguest sense of divine sentimental love, but because at the climax of redemptive history God supremely reveals himself to be the loving, sin-bearing God anticipated by the trajectories of old covenant revelation.¹⁹ Unfortunately, by setting up his thesis in an antithetical way—the cross is revelation and nothing else—Forestell has, sadly, left too much of the text behind.

¹⁹ See the important discussion of John Morgan-Wynne, *The Cross in the Johannine Writings* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011) *passim*.