

RBL 12/2007



Taeger, Jens-W.
Koch, Dietrich-Alex, and David Bienert, eds.

Johanneische Perspektiven: Aufsätze zur Johannesapokalypse und zum johanneischen Kreis 1984–2003

Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 215

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006. Pp. 254.
Hardcover. €69.90. ISBN 352553082X.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
Harvard University Divinity School
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Johanneische Perspektiven has been edited by Dietrich Alex Koch and David C. Bienert in honor and memory of Jens-Wilhelm Taeger, a professor at the University of Münster whose untimely death prevented him from collecting his scattered essays on John's Apocalypse into one volume. In addition to seven essays—"Einige neuere Veröffentlichungen zur Apokalypse des Johannes"; "Der Konservative Rebell: Zum Widerstand des Diotrephes gegen den Presbyter"; "Gesiegt! O himmlische Musik des Wortes: Zur Entfaltung des Siegesmotivs in den johanneischen Schriften"; "Eine fulminante Streitschrift: Bemerkungen zur Apokalypse des Joannes"; "Begründetes Schweigen: Paulus und paulinische Tradition in der Johannesapokalypse"; "Hell oder Dunkel? Zur neueren Debatte um die Auslegung des ersten apokalyptischen Reiters"; and "Offenbarung 1,1–3: Johanneische Autorisierung einer Aufklärungsschrift"—the editors also have included a number of sermon-exegeses of the Gospel and the Revelation of John as well as a sermon on Rev 5:1–5.

The work of Taeger is introduced by three explanatory essays: Dietrich-Alex Koch (Münster) praises Taeger as a New Testament scholar and theologian ("Taeger als Neutestamentler und Theologe"), whereas the essays by Martin Karrer (Wuppertal) ("Die Apokalypse—Eine fulminante Streitschrift unter Einfluss des johanneischen

Gemeindeverbandes: Jens-W. Taegers Beitrag zur Erforschung der Apk und der joh Theologieentwicklung”) and Friedrich Wilhelm Horn (Mainz) (“Johannesapokalypse und johanneischer Kreis: Zu Jens-Wilhelm Taegers Methode des motivgeschichtlichen Vergleichs innerhalb des Corpus Johanneum”) appropriately elaborate Taeger’s contribution to the dating of Revelation and the discussion as to whether Revelation belongs to the “Johannine school.” The book is concluded with a bibliography of Prof. Dr. Jens-W. Taeger by David C. Bienert and a subject and person index.

These three framing essays highlight the significance of Taeger’s work. Koch underscores its theological character, whereas Karrer and Horn focus on Taeger’s exegetical-historical theses. Koch characterizes Taeger as “a passionate theologian and enthusiastic exegete” who could pay careful attention to individual texts and at the same time keep in mind the hermeneutical responsibility of the exegete for the subject matter (die Sache) of theology, because for him the subject matter of theology was concentrated in the discipline of New Testament studies (11). The “inner compass” of Taeger’s theology was “the Pauline theology of the cross and the view of the human being that resulted from it” (12). According to Koch, for Taeger New Testament scholarship realizes its task as a theological discipline if the text compels one to preach. Theological exegesis engenders the zest to preach (die Lust zum Predigen).

The essays of Horn and Karrer in turn underscore Taeger’s contributions to historical-critical scholarship and stress the following four aspects. (1) Taeger raised the source-critical question over and against the general scholarly agreement in Revelation studies that the book is an artful rhetorical composition by the author. However, his source-critical operations seem to have been restricted to 1:1–3, which he attributed to a final redactor.

(2) Most debated is his thesis that Revelation is a late expression of the Johannine school and belongs to the thought-world of the Johannine circle. Although Taeger also acknowledged elements of the Pauline tradition, he argued that Revelation takes up the Johannine tradition in the same way that the author of 1 John and the final redactor of the Fourth Gospel did (266). Taeger’s central research question remained how to integrate Revelation into the history of early Christianity.

(3) Because Taeger saw Revelation as belonging to the *Corpus Johanneum* and was convinced that no persecutions of Christians had taken place under Domitian, he argues for a late dating of Revelation. Hence, he suggested that the book is best situated at the beginning of the second century in the reign of Trajan (90–117 C.E.).

(4) Taeger insists on the Christian theological character of Revelation, which stresses the significance of Christ, the Lamb, for the overall theology of the book and theologically essentializes the imperial power of Rome as that of Satan.

While not discussed in these three framing articles, it is clear that Taeger's thesis of the Johannine character of Revelation is also influenced by the theological-canonical classification of the book. While such a canonical-theological classification of Revelation did not prevent him also from recognizing its moorings in the Pauline tradition, his theological essentialism prohibited his recognition of a liberationist reading of Revelation's rhetoric. Taeger accepted L. L. Thompson's arguments that under Domitian Christian communities did not experience Roman persecution or harassment, rather than consider that imperial power and violence was actually determining the context of the book. While Taeger's response to date Revelation later under Trajan opens up new vistas, his theological essentializing response is problematic. He argued that it is not the historical imperial situation but John's theological conviction that the Roman Empire is Satanic and hence does not allow for co-existence that determines the book's theological arguments. Thus he "spiritualizes" Revelation's political rhetoric in favor of a theological essentialism that dehistoricizes Revelation's critique of empire.

In all, *Johanneische Perspektiven* is a helpful commemoration of and introduction to the work of Taeger and keeps the debates alive that have determined the historical-theological interpretation of the book of Revelation. It would have been interesting to see how Taeger's work would have further developed if he had had the time to engage seriously the "new" approaches that have developed in Revelation scholarship in the past twenty or so years.