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Paulus und Johannes

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Although not titled as such, this volume represents a Festschrift dedicated to Jürgen Becker, Professor Emeritus for the New Testament at the University of Kiel, for the occasion of his seventieth birthday. It collects the exegetical papers on John and Paul delivered at a symposium on 21–23 January 2005, at the Christian-Albrechts-University at Kiel. It includes four essays on John (3–175), nine on Paul (179–469), a concluding article by Becker on John and Paul, a list of the authors, a list of Becker’s publications from 1999 to 2005, a scriptural index, and an author index (473–556).

In “Zu Hintergrund und Funktion des johanneischen Dualismus” (3–73), Jörg Frey maintains that the meaning of the Johannine dualistic forms of speech are to be determined not from a possible history of religions context but from the literary context of the Gospel of John itself. Johannine dualism is not unified, so that it would be preferable to speak of dualisms or dualistic motifs. Literarily and theologically, the meaning and function of the various dualistic motifs are to be determined by their position within the dramatic and revelatory dynamics of the Gospel. The various dualistic speech forms work together to produce a unified effect on the audience and, hermeneutically, are not to be interpreted apart from their relationship to this audience.

Klaus Scholtissek, in “Mündiger Glaube: Zur Architektur und Pragmatik johanneischer Begegnungsgeschichten: Joh 5 und Joh 9” (75–105), compares the stories of the encounters of Jesus, on the one hand, and of the Jews, on the other, with the healed lame man in John 5 and with the healed man born blind in John 9. These stories are designed to lead the “crypto-believers” in the audience to proclaim their faith. They advise believers that in the expression of their faith they are to remain humble, realizing that their own faith is always incomplete and a work in progress, subject to dangers and threats, and so always in need of the way to growth in faith provided by Jesus, as exemplified in these encounter stories.

In “Das Johannesevangelium—Zeugnis eines synagogalen ‘Judenchristentums’?” (107–58), Michael Theobald treats the question of the narrative role of believing Jews in John. The Evangelist wrote with an awareness that in his day (A.D. 80–90) there was a “Jewish Christianity” based mainly in Jerusalem and not yet separated from Jewish synagogal associations. The reason for the expulsion of Jewish believers from synagogues was their high Christology, which was seen as a threat to monotheism. The narrative role of this is to establish that, from the viewpoint of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, faith in Christ cannot be combined with the faith of Israel. The audience is to be convinced that their faith corresponds to the truth of Israel’s scriptures but to form their ecclesial identity in separation from the synagogue.

Jean Zumstein, in “Das hermeneutische Problem der johanneischen Metaphern am Beispiel der Hirtenrede (Joh 10)” (159–75), discusses four problems regarding the Johannine metaphors involving shepherding in John 10: the transition from John 9 to 10; the parabolic speech in 10:1–5; the hermeneutical-pragmatic expression in 10:6; and the characteristics of the second speech in 10:7–22. The interpretation of the imagery in John 10 is not to be separated from the argumentative process of John 9 in which it is embedded. This means that the “I am” sayings in John 10 are not revelational formulas as in John 6 and 8 but have a clarifying function aimed at deepening and structuring the faith of the audience. The relation of John 10 to 9 leads to the theological conclusion that the audience is no longer invited to defend the legitimacy of their faith before the Jewish authorities but to realize their new religious identity within the framework of the Christian community.

In “‘Zorn’ und ‘Zorn Gottes’ im Römerbrief” (179–215), Reinhard von Bendemann, after considering the history of religions background to the concept of the wrath of God, especially in Aristotle and Seneca, maintains that its meaning in Romans can be described only on the basis of its Old Testament and early Jewish background. He concludes that the threat of the wrath of God in the early part of Romans is overcome by what God has done in the death of Jesus, so that for Christians there is no one to accuse them; they are

free from judgment, immune from evil powers, and not to be separated from the love of God.

In “Universalität und Partikularität: Die amplifikatorische Struktur von Römer 5,12–21” (217–68), David Hellholm analyzes the amplifying phenomenon in the structure of Rom 5:12–21, presents detailed exegetical remarks based on this analysis, and then analyzes the function of the passage in the letter. He concludes that universality predominates over particularity in Paul’s dialogue with the Jewish synagogue or Jewish propaganda.

In “‘Werke des Gesetzes’: Untersuchungen zu der paulinischen Rede von den ἔργα νόμου” (271–310), Otfried Hofius investigates the meaning of the concept of the “works of the law” and its use in Romans and Galatians, noting that linguistically it does not refer to God’s regulations or commandments in the law but to what the law demands from human beings. Among his conclusions is that the assertion that no one is justified by the works of the law (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:20) means that human beings are unable to do what is commanded by the law because of universal sinfulness. This fundamental assertion is thus neither a negative judgment about the Torah nor about obedience to any of God’s commandments within it.

In “Paulus—Pharisäer und Apostel” (311–51), Andreas Lindemann discusses historical information about the Pharisees, Paul as a Pharisee, the understanding of justification in Paul and in the Psalms of Solomon, and Paul as apostle. He concludes that as a Pharisee Paul was convinced that in their doing of the Torah human beings are promised the corresponding justification, as stated in the Psalms of Solomon. But after his Damascus experience Paul believed this conviction was erroneous. He viewed this change of thinking as due not to his subjective judgment but to God’s revelation.

In “Der Galaterbrief als urchristlicher Gemeindeleitungsbrief” (353–80), Ulrich Mell notes that Galatians exhibits most of the characteristics of early Jewish letters of community leadership. He then examines the Pauline mission to the communities in Galatia and concludes that Galatians was sent as a circular letter of community leadership to the various communities in northern Galatia in order to provide them a link, through the Torah-independent gospel, to the authoritative Christian leadership represented by Paul and all the brothers with him (Gal 1:1–2).

In “Verwerfung und Annahme: Das Geschick Israels nach Röm 9–11” (381–410), Dieter Sänger maintains that chapters 9–11 in Romans are an integral part of the letter and should be interpreted accordingly. Consequently, the power of the gospel for the salvation of everyone who believes, Jew first and then Greek (1:16), provides a basis for the hope that, in accord with God’s continuing faithfulness to his promises as revealed in Christ,

the entire people of Israel, even those who have currently rejected the gospel, will be saved (11:26).

In “Ästhetische Aspekte der Sprache in den Briefen des Paulus” (411–26), Gerhard Sellin draws attention to an oft-neglected dimension of the Pauline letters: their aesthetic aspects. He demonstrates the potential that a consideration of the artistry of such rhetorical figures as asyndeton, alliteration, assonance, poetic parallelism, rhythm, and the like holds for a fuller understanding and appreciation of what and how Paul is communicating by an analysis of Rom 12:9–21, a text rich in rhetorical figures. That Paul overwhelmingly uses more participles and infinitives than imperatives in this text indicates that he is *describing*, rather than *prescribing*, a possibly meaningful conduct. The poetics of this text illustrate how Christian conduct corresponds not to a doctrine, manifesto, or dictate, but is rather a *liberating possibility*.

In “Das Kreuz als Sühne und Ärgernis: Zwei Deutungen des Todes Jesu bei Paulus” (427–55) Gerd Theissen first considers the death of Jesus as a cultic, juridical, and diplomatic atonement and then as a theological, social, and political scandal. The dimensions of the death of Jesus as atonement and as scandal are combined in the Christian’s conformity with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. The atonement of Jesus overcomes the guilt of sin; the scandal of the cross gives freedom from the world. Both are combined in a way that conformity to the cross creates freedom also from sinfulness.

In “Politische Theologie im Philipperbrief?” (457–69), Samuel Vollenweider deals with the question of whether Paul intended Philippians to be heard as a political letter. Presupposing the unity of the letter, he considers how the gospel is presented as corresponding to the life of a citizen (1:27–2:4), the world supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:5–11), the citizenship in heaven (3:20–21), the day of Christ (1:6, 10; 2:15–16), and the apostle in chains (1:7ff.). He answers that Philippians is political not in the sense of Paul advocating a subversive program against the Roman Empire but in a broader sense of offering in the church a better alternative to current political systems. The Christian church realizes the ideals of what a political system should be.

In “Das Verhältnis des johanneischen Kreises zum Paulinismus: Anregungen zur Belebung einer Diskussion” (473–95), Jürgen Becker compares the Johannine with the Pauline writings, concluding that they stand independently next to each other. They develop the fundamental traditions of early Christianity in their own various, complex, and unique ways, based on their different missions and the different communities to whom they are addressed.

Methodologically, these articles are mainly concerned with rhetorical, literary, and synchronic approaches, continuing a major trend in contemporary New Testament studies. This reviewer hopes that scholars will follow the lead of Sellin and devote more attention to the aesthetics and artistry evident in all of the writings of the New Testament.