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**Zapf, Hauprecht. *Johannes der Evangelist über alle Kapitel erklärt. Ein Bibelkommentar von 1597.* Ed. Martin Rothkegel**

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his legacy as a scholar mark an important contribution to our understanding of the intellectual aspirations common to Renaissance art and literature, and their grounding in discursive modes of thought.

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**Zapf, Hauprecht.**

***Johannes der Evangelist über alle Kapitel erklärt. Ein Bibelkommentar von 1597.* Ed. Martin Rothkegel.**

MacGregor, MB: Hutterian Brethren Book Centre, 2017. Pp. xx, 446. ISBN 978-1927913-57-4 (hardcover) n.p.

Hauprecht Zapf (ca. 1546–1630) grew up in a Swiss Brethren congregation that had migrated to Moravia and joined the Hutterites. He was trained as a professional scribe and exercised that role for thirty years as the highly esteemed secretary of the Neumuehl/Nove Mlyny Hutterite community. He was elected to the ministry in 1594. In addition to this commentary, he wrote, among other things, a codex of baptismal catechesis.

Martin Rothkegel is professor of church history at the Elstal Baptist Seminary near Berlin. His critical apparatus is outstanding. It includes judicious modernizing of German orthography and style, footnotes for shifts in meaning of words, endnotes for specific word substitutions, and comprehensive indices.

This commentary on the Gospel of John is part of a recent wave of publications by late sixteenth-century successor movements to Anabaptism. For instance, Arnold Snyder's *Later Writings of the Swiss Anabaptists* documents the theological development of the Swiss stream. The foreword to *Johannes der Evangelist* reminds the reader that this manuscript is one of many that have been discovered recently in Eastern European archives. Martin Rothkegel's editing of Zapf's *Johannes der Evangelist* documents the evolution of Hutterite scriptural exposition in the post-tolerance era of the movement. Writings from the founding era are widely read and used by Hutterite communities today for sermon preparation and edification.

Zapf's expository method is to look at one or several verses, to which he then adds interpretive comments (often allegorical) and a practical application. At various points, he makes a direct application of the text to the persecuted lot of Hutterites in his time. Zapf has the habit of combining his comments on a particular matter with the addition of biblical texts that complement the passage he is explaining (183, 224). Commenting on John 3:1–2, for example, the author writes that Nicodemus is like good people in his day who agree with Anabaptist teaching but are afraid to join it for fear of persecution (53–54). Even so, direct complaints against their persecutors are few (381, 383). Zapf's overarching concern is to guide people into lives of self-sacrificing discipleship. At the same time, he grounds this way of life in a strong theology of grace (93, 130).

John's Gospel goes further than other New Testament writings in making ontological claims for Jesus. Zapf seems to be at home in this esoteric realm. He demonstrates a knowledgeable theological vocabulary to make orthodox Christian claims using creedal language (14, 109, 218). Given this stance, it is perplexing that there is less than a handful of references to God as Trinity. This high Christology stands out because the author (along with his community) later in the commentary unmistakably dissents from the Catholic position on sacraments and ecclesiology. Rothkegel wonders if the emphasis on Christology might be a veiled response to the anti-Trinitarianism of the Polish Brethren (xii).

The author's commentary on John 6, one of the longest in his book, vigorously refutes the literal interpretation of "flesh" and "blood" and its application to the Lord's Supper in Catholic teaching.

There is an overall intensity to the commentary, with literary flourishes, on John 13–15. The theme is faithfulness to Christ and the church. The first two reflections concern John 13. Even though Jesus was about to return to his "divine clarity" and "divine form" (269, 281), Jesus humbles himself to wash the hearts as well as the feet of his disciples (271). This cleansing happens even today among believers through fraternal address and chastisement (274). Judas's betrayal of Jesus stands as a warning to communities today (279). The third reflection deals at length with the themes of love and hatred in John 15. Almost putting words into Jesus's mouth, Zapf adds passages from throughout the Bible to emphasize that as the Father has loved Jesus so Jesus has loved his

followers (312–14). But those who love as Jesus loved can expect to be hated like the prophets were and like faithful believers are today (317–22).

A number of the overall characteristics of *Johannes der Evangelist* stand out. One of them is that there are astonishingly few references throughout the book to typical Anabaptist themes, even when a text would allow for them. This is true, for example, for baptism, the sword, and the community of goods. The “golden age” of the Hutterites was past and persecution had returned. Was the omission of these contentious topics an olive branch extended toward the authorities?

Another noteworthy characteristic is that Zapf’s command of technical vocabulary, as I have noted concerning Christology, seems to be above the reach of someone who had no higher education. Was he an autodidact? Might he have gained a higher education before he was baptized into the Hutterite church? The length of the book—an astonishing 420 pages of text—suggests a well-read author. While much of the commentary is cast into typical pious language, a disciplined hand has been shaping the material his own way.

*Johannes der Evangelist* is a highly enriching addition to Hutterite literature of the time. It is often said that Hutterite preaching and piety settled into routine and order earlier than in some other Anabaptist movements. This volume makes it clear that there continued to be spiritual vigour and theological creativity at work late in the sixteenth century and that men like Hauprecht Zapf were honoured by their generation and subsequent ones for the relevance of their biblical exposition. We have reason to be grateful for Martin Rothkegel’s careful and original scholarship in bringing a lost treasure to light.

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