

**Hauprecht Zapff, *Johannes Der Evangelist über alle Kapitel erklärt: Ein täuferischer Bibelkommentar von 1597*. Ed. Martin Rothkegel. MacGregor, Manitoba: Hutterian Brethren Book Centre, 2017. Pp. xx + 446. Hardcover, \$59.99.**

The publication of this attractive, well edited, commentary of the Gospel of John by Hauprecht Zapff, in the original old German, opens up a new body of literature for both scholars and Hutterites. Up to now, no Hutterite Bible commentary has been published, and few knew that such commentaries even existed. This publication, thus, provides a new insight into sixteenth century Hutterite thought and level of Biblical knowledge.

Zapff's commentary was written in 1597 during the latter part of the Hutterites' "Golden Years" of 1560s to 1590s, when Hutterites in Moravia and Hungary, now Slovakia, numbered about 30,000. He was born in 1546 or 1547 near Mainz in the Rhineland-Palatinate, and likely joined the Hutterites in Moravia in the late 1550s. He served as a *Schreibmeister*, master writer, for 30 years until 1594, and then as minister in Neumuehl (Nove Mlyny) near Nikolsburg, Moravia until 1622. After the Hutterite communities in Moravia were completely destroyed in 1622, Zapff fled to the Saba-

tisch (Sobotiste) community in Hungary, where he continued to serve as minister until his death in 1630. As *Schreibmeister*, Zapff's duties were, among others, to prepare official church correspondence, record church decisions, and copy book manuscripts for use by ministers. He also continued the *Great Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* begun by Casper Braitmichel in 1541, wrote a commentary of the Gospel of Luke, and a Handbook used in preparation for baptism.

To write his Gospel of John commentary, Zapff used Christoph Froschauer's German translation of the New Testament published in Zurich in 1524. Martin Rothkegel added verse references since the Froschauer translation only had chapter divisions. His methodology of interpreting the Bible was quite different from that used by earlier Hutterite Bible commentators. Instead of using allegory and typology, Zapff focused more on the literal meaning of the text. For each verse he explained the text, discussed its assumptions and context, and referred to other biblical texts that dealt with similar issues. This was followed with an application of the text to the life of the community. The application was usually longer than the discussion of the text.

A major theme in Zapff's practical applications was the new birth in Christ, through which the believer is able to follow Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*). This new life is a work of the Holy Spirit, and presupposes repentance and faith. Its external sign is baptism, in which the person publicly commits to faith in God, and to live as a faithful member of the Hutterite church. In addition to the new birth, Zapff's themes were God's love, discipleship, peace and community. He addressed issues, but was not polemical. He made no direct reference to either Protestants or Catholics. According to the editor's introduction, this Bible commentary was intended for use by ministers, not by members of the church. This indicates that in Zapff's time, Hutterite preachers did not read prepared sermons handed down from previous ministers, as they did later, but prepared their own sermons.

Martin Rothkegel, a professor of Church History in Berlin, discovered this manuscript of the commentary of the Gospel of John in a library in Hermannstadt (Sibiu), Romania. As a scholar of Anabaptism he recognized the importance of what he had discovered. When Jesse Hofer, from the Schmiedeleut Group One Hutterites in Manitoba, heard about this discovery, he offered to help bring it to publication. Hofer arranged with Joseph Stahl, Dariusleut Hutterite minister from Saskatchewan to have the original Suetterlin handwritten script transcribed to Latin lettering. This was typed into digital form by Paul Hofer, Schmiedeleut One, edited by Mar-

tin Rothkegel, and published by Kenny Wollman and the Hutterite Book Centre, also a Schmiedeleut One affiliate. As Jesse Hofer said in personal correspondence, this was a remarkable cooperative effort between two Hutterite groups, and a German scholar. According to Rothkegel there are approximately another 500 manuscripts, in at least 30 archives and libraries in Europe, waiting to be researched. These are mainly documents stolen from Hutterites during their years of persecution in the seventeenth century.

The aim of publishing this commentary is best expressed by Jesse Hofer in the Introduction by the Publisher. "We hope that the publication of Hutterite source material will contribute to the strengthening of Hutterite identity in a new generation, ... and that Hutterites may witness to *Nachfolge Jesu*, community, and non-resistance ... for the glory of God and the wellbeing of all people."

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