

The Johannine Epistles. By Rudolf Schnackenburg. Translation by Reginald and Ilse Fuller. New York: Crossroad, 1992, xv + 320 pp., \$39.50.*

D. A. Carson, in his recent commentary survey, expresses regret that Schnackenburg's commentary on the Johannine epistles has never been translated. Now it has. While the work is a helpful addition to the English-speaking literature on this corpus, it is not exactly brand new — the first German edition of this work appeared in 1953, and the version translated here is the seventh German edition dating from 1984. This edition, in turn, differs from the sixth edition of 1979 merely by some added material on selected topics. It does not include, however, any extensive interaction with commentaries published after this date, such as Raymond Brown's work, which appeared in 1982.

The publication of this work at this time is therefore somewhat of an oddity. The original setting in time of Schnackenburg's commentary is revealed by frequent references to works published in the early 1950s as "recent." Perhaps it is best to follow the lead of the publisher who labels the work as marking the conclusion of an era that saw three great Johannine scholars, Rudolf Bultmann, Raymond Brown and Rudolf Schnackenburg, each publish major commentaries, first on the fourth gospel and subsequently on the Johannine epistles. One's collection is now complete.

The work includes, as does Schnackenburg's three-volume commentary on John's gospel, substantial excursuses on topics such as "fellowship with God," "gnosticism," "the antichrist," or "being born of God." The discussion of introductory matters is erudite and fairly evenhanded. Generally, however, Schnackenburg's rather cautious discussions leave the reader unsatisfied owing to their noncommittal stance. Schnackenburg also gives insufficient consideration to the possibility of common authorship of the fourth gospel and the Johannine epistles. He manages to speak very favorably of the possibility of common authorship and yet ends up by rejecting it without adequate discussion, much less convincing argumentation. The external evidence and the apparent claim of eyewitness testimony in passages such as 1 John 1:1–4 would appear to call for more serious consideration. Likewise, Schnackenburg's discussion of whether the gospel or the epistles were written first is unduly brief and ends rather abruptly.

Overall, this commentary has primarily documentary value for the contemporary reader. One is left longing for a fresh treatment that rises above the stale, and at times dogmatic, brand of German scholarship that dominated the first half of the twentieth century, a treatment that would be more open to the possibility of Johannine authorship, more pastoral and relevant in its orientation, and one that would incorporate recent linguistic advances in Biblical scholarship such as verbal aspect theory (cf. e.g. Schnackenburg's claim that the aorist in 2:19 indicates that false teachers left the community at a particular point in time). Will D. A. Carson's forthcoming NICNT commentary be this kind of work?

Despite its limitations, Schnackenburg's treatment probably still deserved to be translated. For my part, I prefer the commentaries by Stott or Marshall. Finally, if one of Schnackenburg's works should have been translated, why not the fourth supplementary volume to his John commentary? This might have been the better and more strategic choice.

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