

## BOOK REVIEWS

Beagley, Alan James. *The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies*. Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 50. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987. 207 pp. \$51.25.

This book is a revision of Alan Beagley's Ph.D. dissertation (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1983), which was a reaction to the prevailing trend in Apocalypse scholarship to read the book of Revelation against the backdrop of violent persecution of Christians by Rome, presumably during the reign of Domitian. Instead, Beagley argues that the author's primary focus was judgments on the nation of Israel (or Judaism), and particularly upon the city of Jerusalem.

Chapter 1 surveys the Jewish experience of persecution prior to the time when the Apocalypse was written. Beagley argues that most of that suffering and martyrdom took place at the hands of fellow Jews rather than non-Jews. Antiochus Epiphanes' motives, for example, were political rather than religious. Nevertheless, his attempts to control Palestine resulted in a division between Jews allied to him ("innovators") and those who resisted ("traditionalists"). Beagley suggests that the time of the Apocalypse is analogous. It is the Christian Jews who are the innovators and are being persecuted by the traditionalists (non-Christian Jews), who, in this case, are the ones who have enlisted the help of the Empire.

The second chapter contains a survey of the passages in the Apocalypse that involve opponents of the Christian faith. Beagley points out that at the only point in the book where its message is relatively explicit, the seven letters, there are two references to "pseudo-Jews" (Rev 2:9; 3:9—whom he understands to be Jewish citizens of the Empire who do not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah) and none at all to the Imperial authorities. Therefore, the former are perceived as the greater danger. From that point on, Beagley sees Jewish enemies lurking behind every symbol. Rev 6 and 18 parallel the Synoptic Apocalypse, which highlights the fall of Jerusalem. The trumpets are based on OT judgments on the Jewish people. Chapter 11 concerns the fate of Jerusalem and its temple. The harlot and great city of chapters 17 and 18 are Jerusalem and Judaism (a view already promulgated by Josephine Ford), rather than Rome, which is symbolized by the seven-headed beast. Since there is little hard evidence for serious persecution of Christians by Rome in the first century, Beagley concludes that the author's main concern was the alliance between Judaism and Rome, with particular focus on Judaism.

Chapters 3 and 4 are subsidiary to Beagley's argument. In chapter 3 he shows convincingly that in the OT prophets Jerusalem is always condemned for its present condition and that hope is offered only for the future. In chapter 4 he observes that the earthly Jerusalem is generally viewed negatively in the NT as the representative of unbelieving Israel. The Christian's hope is in a heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:21-26). Since the visions of judgment in Revelation draw heavily from the OT prophetic denunciations of Jerusalem, Beagley concludes that the earthly Jerusalem and non-Christian Judaism are the primary enemies of the author of Revelation.

The heart of Beagley's case must stand or fall on the success of his argument in chapter 2. His case there has much to commend it. If it is true, as U. B. Müller has argued, that the seven letters provide a prose "envelope" to aid the reader in the acceptance and interpretation of the apocalyptic symbolism of the main part of the book, it is striking that there is no reference to Rome there. Instead, the church faces danger from "pseudo-Jews" and from enemies within (such as the Nicolaitans and "Jezebel"—Rev 2:6, 14-16, 20-23).

Beagley, however, undoubtedly overstates his case. For example, although it is true that some of the seven trumpets are based on judgments against ancient Israel and Judah, a stronger case could be made that they are primarily based on judgments on Egypt, Jericho, and Babylon—heathen powers that opposed OT Israel. And just as in the Synoptic Apocalypse the fall of Jerusalem becomes a paradigm for the end of the world, so in the seals (written after A.D. 70), the language of the Synoptic Apocalypse seems to serve more universal ends than merely a judgment on the city of Jerusalem.

I find the insights of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (see review in *AUSS* 26 [1988]: 161) more convincing. She argued that the main opponents in the letters are fellow Christians of a different stripe than John. It is possible that even the "pseudo-Jews" of 2:9 and 3:9 are to be understood as "counterfeit" Christians and should be classed with the Nicolaitans, the Jezebels, and other potential opposers of the message of the Apocalypse. As Hans LaRondelle has convincingly shown (see review in *AUSS* 22 [1984]: 373-376), the dividing line of concern in the NT is faith in Christ. The true Jew is the one who believes in Jesus. Jews who do not believe in Jesus are classed with the Gentiles (Acts 4:24-28; cf. Joel 2:32-3:15). Thus, it is less than certain that John would be particularly interested in singling out the Jews as special enemies of the church after A.D. 70.

Whether the main opponents in Revelation are non-Christian Jews or false Christians, however, Beagley has served us well in calling for a re-evaluation of the evidence regarding these opponents. Future studies of the subject will have to take his arguments into account.