
BOOK REVIEW

Reading Revelation after Supersessionism: An Apocalyptic Journey of Socially Identifying John's Multi-Ethnic Ekklēsia with the Ekklēsia of Israel, by Ralph Korner. Cascade, 2020. 312 pp., Kindle., \$9.99. ISBN: 978-1-7252-7465-5

Reviewed by Lorenzo DiTommaso, Concordia University Montréal,
L.DiTommaso@concordia.ca

Ralph J. Korner's new book, *Reading Revelation after Supersessionism*, is part of Cascade Press's series on "The New Testament after Supersessionism." Each volume in the series addresses a book in the New Testament in the light of "God's irrevocable covenant with the Jewish people as a central part of ecclesial teaching." Supersessionism is the conviction that God's new covenant in Christ has abrogated the older covenant with Israel and thus replaced it. The corollary of this perspective is that Jews who persist in remaining outside the Church (*ekklēsia*) are disqualified from salvation. The *locus classicus* is Heb. 8:7–13 (*cf.* Jer. 31:31–34). Its meaning turns on how one understands "the house of Israel" (Heb 8:8, 10) as the object of the new covenant.

Korner's book takes up the issue of supersessionism in the Revelation of John. Its first three chapters cover definitions of key terms ("Jews," "Christians," etc.), the meaning and usage of *ekklēsia* ("church"/"assembly") in its Jewish contexts, and the question of the composition and date of Revelation. Chapter Four discusses the ways that two potentially "anti-Judaistic" passages (Rev 2:9 and 3:9) might have been meant by John and understood by his intended audience. Chapters Five and Six investigate the *ekklēsia* as a "semi-public association" and a Jewish synagogue term. In all these chapters, Korner's arguments are well-positioned within the recent revolutionary scholarship on Christians and Jews in Asia Minor at the end of the first century CE.

Chapter 7 situates John's *ekklēsia* within the hope for the eschatological New Jerusalem. The trope appears in a wide range of Jewish literature from the Second Temple period. Most important are Ezekiel 40–48, the Dead Sea *New Jerusalem* text, and some Jewish apocalyptic writings (esp. *4 Ezra*). According to Korner, John considered the heavenly New Jerusalem that will descend from Heaven at the end of time (Revelation 20–21) to already be invisibly present in the body of the universal *ekklēsia* / the Jewish *Christos*.

Chapter 8, on John's *ekklēsia*, is the longest and most developed section of the book. Korner skillfully negotiates among the conflicting definitions of "prophecy" and "apocalyptic" as they inform the structure and message of Revelation. For Korner, although Revelation's eschatology is largely apocalyptic, its form and function are essentially prophetic. Revelation is thus an "apocalyptic apostolic-prophecy," which is perhaps the best short description of the book that I have read. The prophetic affirmations that begin and end its text (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18–19) demonstrate how John anchored his message in the tradition of biblical prophets. A concluding chapter ties together Korner's arguments about John's "extensive valuation of all things Jewish" (240).

Korner's solution to the problem of supersessionism in the Revelation of John is novel and, to my mind, plausible. John envisions the *ekklēsia* not to replace or supersede Israel, but to be emplaced within God's eternal covenant, before the imminent fulfilment of the divine plan. On the other hand, Revelation is a supersessionist book, but its target is Rome, the final, greatest, and most oppressive of world-empires. John's message is that the heavenly Kingdom of God supersedes the earthly Kingdom of Rome.

In sum, Korner's book represents a valuable contribution to the study of the Revelation of John and a fresh way of regarding the issue of supersessionism in this most enigmatic and culturally influential of all apocalypses.