

Book Reviews

The Cosmic Conflict of the Church : An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12:7-12; by Peter Antonysamy Abir; Peter Lang; *Europaischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, Frankfurt am Main, 1995; pp. xxx + 365.*

This is a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Gregorian University, Rome. The aim of the author is to show that the crisis-conflict motif which is part and parcel of both the O. T. and N. T. dispensations is the central theme of the Book of Revelation, more especially of ch. 12:7-12 which in a mythical language of conflict deals with the historical context of power-struggle between the Church and the imperial forces, between God and anti-God, leading to the resolution of the conflict through the definitive and ultimate conquest by the Slaughtered Lamb.

The Book is divided into three parts :

Part A in two chapters deals with the general background of Revelation and a literary study of Rev. 12:7-12. *Chapter 1* besides treating the introductory questions about the authorship and date of composition, analyzes the socio-historical context as well as the literary genre of Revelation. *Chapter 2* makes a literary study of Rev. 12:7-12 from the point of view of source-tradition criticism, structural analysis and symbolisms used in the pericope and shows that in ch. 12 which is the fulcrum of the whole book, verses 7-12 occupy the central place both structurally and thematically.

Part B which forms the main section, comprises the 3 next chapters dealing with a thorough exegetico-theological study of the text.

Ch. 3 studies "the War in Heaven" between Michael and the Dragon as depicted in verse 7, from the point of view of the holy war motif in O. T. and Judaism and in the

context of the religio-political conflict of the Church in Asia Minor. In *ch. 4* verses 8-10 are explained in terms of divine intervention in which the conflict encountered by the Church is brought to an end in the defeat of the Dragon by Christ the Slain Lamb. *Ch. 5* presents verses 11-12 as ground and model for the victory of the Church over the evil forces represented by the Dragon. The Church is portrayed as a *martyr* bearing witness to Jesus and his Gospel through a life of committed endurance amidst trials and persecutions.

Part C works out a theological synthesis of the whole study in the context of the Rhetorical Function of the conflict. Thus *ch. 6* closes with the conclusion from the point of view of Theological Rhetoric and that of Dynamic Rhetoric : the former portraying the Lamb as the primary actor who has complete control over the anti-God forces thus evoking a firm Christian commitment amidst persecutions, and the latter calling for committed action from the part of the Church in the context of dehumanising evil forces amid which she has to live. The conquest however will be achieved, after the model of Jesus, the Slain Lamb through a life of non-violent confrontation, namely denial of self leading thus to a daily martyrdom. In a brief Appendix the author relates and applies the results of his study to the Church in India which is threatened today by evil forces such as Religious Fundamentalism, Communalism and Casteism and calls for a commitment to non-violence (Ahimsa), inter-religious dialogue and inculturation.

The author deserves to be congratulated for the painstaking and meticulous work he has written. No detail is left out in the study of the text. Textual problems are sorted out, individual words and phrases are investigated from linguistic, grammatical, cultural, exegetical and religious background; positions are taken from a theological point of view and results are succinctly summed up at the end of

each chapter. The whole work is an example of a rigorous logic followed by way of method in writing dissertations. The foot notes going up to more than 1600 speak for the author's way of expressing his indebtedness to others as well as his vast reading on the topic. Both the bibliography of the Commentaries on Revelation and the studies on ch. 12 of Revelation are exhaustive in so far as they go far back to 1889 and come up to 1994.

However, a few points need to be mentioned. Rather than leaving the Appendix which makes the study contextual hang on separately, the author should have inserted it as part of the last chapter in the explanation of the Rhetorical Alternative or even in the earlier chapters as part of the hermeneutical reflection.

A lot of undue repetitions could have been avoided if care was taken before the Dissertation went for publication. Typographical errors, quite a few of them, also mar the printed text. One would have liked an author-index which would help easy reference.

Barring these minor remarks, one must say that the work itself is a good contribution to a better understanding of the mysterious book of Revelation. I would not hesitate in recommending this work for theological libraries.

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