

BOOK REVIEWS

The Psalms : Mirror of the poor : By Marc Girard, Mediaspaul, Montreal, QC H1H 1L1, Canada, 1996 Pp. 139.

It is interesting as well as instructive that a North-American (precisely a Canadian) exegete sweeps across the Southern hemisphere (precisely Brazil) for a year and turns out a little book, a fascinating interpretation of the Psalms, through an approach that is popular, biblical, experiential and pastoral. The Psalms, according to the author, are not merely tools intended to help us to pray, but "are a mirror in which we can see ourselves better" (Back cover). Hence, starting from actual life experience, the author divides the Psalms into 4 categories : The Psalms of Liberation (pp. 37-69), Psalms of Instruction (70-84), Psalms of Praise (85-93), and Psalms of Celebration (95-110). These four families of Psalms are followed by three more chapters : The Original way of Reading the Psalms (111-118); The Psalms as a Popular Spirituality (119-127); Psalms prayed by Jesus and directed to Jesus (129-133) followed by a conclusion in which the author pleads for reviving the Psalms and rewriting them both as individuals and especially as a community.

For one who has been teaching the Psalms for over a quarter of a century, this little book by Girard was truly an eye-opener and quite refreshing indeed. Though the divisions proposed by Gunkel and the Historical Critical Method and followed by most psalmic exponents up to our day are quite valid and meaningful, yet the approach taken by Girard not only in some way incorporates them, but gives a new direction to them by bringing out the fundamental spiritual theme of liberation contained in the Psalms. Thus the Psalms are made to address the concrete problems of today. They take us through a dark tunnel leading us to cry out for political, social, moral, psychic, physical, ecological, existential liberation (Pss. of Liberation). The experience of liberation leads us to a "school of life" (71) in which we are educated in faith, freedom and fellowship. This education is carried on through a programme of justice, through past history, through the options which one makes in life and through liturgy and worship (Pss. of Instruction

through which the liberated ones go to the school to learn.) If the Pss. of Liberation are rooted in Exodus, and the Pss. of Instruction in the covenant, a third group is derived from the theology of creation. Thus we have psalms which put us in admiration, wonder and awe before all the created realities (Pss. of Praise). When we have discovered God's majesty and glory in creation we are automatically led to making out special occasions to rejoice and regale (Pss. of Celebration). Thus life has come a full circle.

The author's recommendation that we constantly rewrite the psalms everyday "in words of blood, sweat and tears" (137) is not merely worth pondering but needs to be lived by every lover of the psalms. Since the book was written for group reflection and prayer the author's pedagogy of interweaving Questions for group exercise is very apt and helpful for leaders who guide small groups like the BCC's. A little book, but very rewarding to read, reflect and react. An Indian edition would be of great use. Will St. Paul's Publications do that?

R.J. Raja S.J.

Haggai, A Prophet for our Times : Everything must be built anew : By Marc Girard, Mediaspaul, Sherbrooke, QC, H1H 1L1 Canada, 1996, Pp. 126.

Haggai, the most "minor" of the biblical prophets after Obadiah, and perhaps even obscure, is made to be alive for our times through this little book of Girard. Haggai who played a key role in the rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem in 520 BC, after it was erased to the ground by the Babylonians in 587 BC, is presented by Girard as a model for "rebuilding all our desecrated, destroyed or crumbling "temples": the biological body, our Christian communities, society in general, family and even the environment of the whole planet" (Back cover).

Writing from Brazil, a country in the process of rebuilding, Girard addresses this commentary "to animators of popular church communities" (8) to help them on their work of reconstruction. In his interpretation of the prophet and his work of rebuilding "the House of

the Lord God", Girard envisions seven aspects of re-reading the prophetic text (37-66) which form the basis for the rest of the book (67-80; 97-112). The Historical and Christological re-readings of the text examine the text at the historical level of *the past* (cf. 520 BC; 30 AD). The Anthropological, Ecclesiological, Social and Ecological re-readings of the text apply the text to *the present*, urging the reader to commit himself / herself to the task of reconstruction at the individual, ecclesial, communitarian and environmental levels. The last way of re-reading the text is Eschatological, which looks to *the future*. It is the creation of the New World by God himself, and which is free from all evil.

Once Girard interprets the Haggaiian text from these seven levels of re-reading (ch.2), he portrays the Temples of the present day in ruins (ch.3); what our natural reactions to these should be (ch.4); the reconstruction model suggested by Hosea (ch.5); our commitment to the cause of rebuilding (ch.6) based on the promise of God (ch.7), and lastly, Christ as the focal point of all reconstruction (ch.8).

Systematically organized, with a style that is simple and straightforward, with questions and points for reflections meant for personal and group exercises, the book is a veritable model for similar contextual interpretation of other prophets, especially for those interested in a committed contextual re-reading of the prophets and for leaders engaged in building up communities around the table of the Word.

R.J. Raja S.J.

By Bicycle from Germany to India : By Fred-Roderich Pohl, ISPCK, 1996. Pp. 77, Rs. 20.

With "the reading of hundreds of books and articles, the writing of many hundreds of letters and DM 2000 for preparation alone" (1), a young lad of 19 makes an adventurous trip across Asia and Africa covering 87000 kilometers for nearly a year. This is surely not "something crazy" (1), but an achievement of which the author must be proud of, and of course the reader too! This travelogue has much

to recommend for any one who is on the move more for pleasure than for just business.

Although the bicycle trip was done in the sixties and this little book is the translation of what Pohl had compiled in his diary and published in German under the title "Mit dem Fahrrad nach Kalkutta", yet this 1996 publication in English translation has not lost its original freshness and charm.

As the author takes us from Germany through Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan etc., to India, the reader is thrilled with the various experiences Pohl had gone through and the different landscapes, anecdotes, peoples and their customs and manners through which he makes the story captivating. The regional, cultural, linguistic and religious peculiarities of each of the countries Pohl had visited receive their due mention which adds to the permanent appeal of the book. The book will make an interesting reading for all adventure-seekers and for people who want to enjoy the thrill of a short travelogue to be finished at one sitting.

R.J. Raja S.J.

The Poor : Sacrament of God : Biblical and Theological Meditation : By Marc Girard, Mediaspaul, Sherbrooke, QC, J1E 2B9, Canada, 1996, Pp. 190.

This is a timely as well as relevant book for all of us, especially for those who are working for the uplift of the poor. Poverty and the poor are not to be viewed as a tragedy, a problem, or a scandal, but as "a school of life for all human beings, and a source of meaning for the Church" (Back cover). The author, as if through a space flight, takes us on to experience "the grandeur and dignity of the poor, founded not only on the human nature they share with the rich, but especially on their unique capacity to reflect the mystery of God" (Back cover).

The Book is organized in 3 sections. "The first: The Poor, a Scandal" (I) presents the grey side of the poor in two chapters: Phenomenological Observations under the title: "The Damned Poor :

A Sacrament (ch.1) and an in-depth Christological study of the theme under the title. "The Poor, Sacrament of a God cast out of the Gate" (ch.2).

The Second section: "The Poor, a Teacher" (II) portrays the positive side under two sub-headings : "The Poor, Sacrament of a plural God" (ch. 3), which delineates the picture of the trinitarian God in the poor and "The Poor, Sacrament of an Accepting and Sharing God" (ch. 4) which presents this God as one who welcomes and gives himself, as do the poor too.

The third section which is titled : "The Poor, a Source of Meaning" (III) is developed under three headings: "The Church : A Sacrament for and with the Poor" (ch. 5) explains how the Church derives its true meaning from the existence of the poor. The next chapter deals with the title: "The Priest : A Sacrament, Poor among the Poor (ch.6) where the author points out that the priest must "symbolize not only Christ as the head and soul of the new humanity, but also the wounded God, bearer of injuries" (142). This chapter is brief (141-152), but well written especially when it deals with the pitfalls into which the modern priest may be lured. The last chapter goes under the title: "The Three Sacraments of the Poor" (ch. 7) where the author touches upon three sacraments which "are more deeply imbued with a theology and mystique of poverty : forgiveness, the anointing of the sick and the Eucharist" (155). The conclusion rounds up with explaining briefly the biblical terminological triad which denotes the poor : "anaw" - not to breathe, "ebeyon" - not to have, "dal" - not be able (183) and the three picturesque images which portray the poor : a measuring device, a prism and an icon.

The reviewer would like to point out the versatility of the author in throwing new, pregnant and provoking insights into the meaning of the Beatitudes (33-56), the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (57-72), the three widows (99-109: I Kgs 17:8-24; LK 2:36-38;21:1-4), the Nazareth manifesto (177-125) and many other texts of Scripture both OT and NT.

At the end of reading the book one must confess with the author that "through the obscurity of the figure of the poor, we sense that transparency of God, the dazzling light of the Invisible" (190). Questions for personal and group reflection interspersed all through the book are a great help to assimilate, personalize and put into action the three convincing contentions of the author that "*The poor* are God's darlings. *The Church* in her mission gives priority to the poor. In *the Kingdom* inaugurated by Jesus, the poor are the kings" (9). An Indian edition of the book is not too much to recommend.

R.J. Raja S.J.