

Editorial

An Indian Biblical Scholar: Raja

St. Paul's Theological College is immensely happy to honour Fr. R.J. Raja, S.J., on the occasion of his retirement from active teaching at the age of 65, by dedicating this special issue of **Vaiharai** of which he was the editor from its inception in 1996.

Trained in the Sacred Scripture at the world renowned Pontifical Biblical Institute (Rome), Raja began his teaching career at St. Paul's in 1971 and served there for about 20 years till his retirement in March 1999 (1971-79; 1982-85; 1990-99). His was a pioneering work as he was the first of the Tamil biblicists. With all zest and zeal he instilled into the young seminarians a thirst and ardent love for Scripture and taught them the art of expounding its riches with a pastoral slant. However, he did not restrict himself to the confines of St. Paul's, but reached out to almost all the theological centres, study houses and formation communities in the country and even abroad. He was one of those instrumental in bringing about the post-Vatican II biblical renewal in Tamilnadu and all over India through seminars, lectures, retreats, conferences and the like to priests, religious and lay people alike. At the national level he has been assisting the director of NBCLC as consultor of the CBCI for Christian Life Commission since 1988. In recognition and appreciation of his services for the Word of God, Pope John Paul II appointed him in 1990 to the Pontifical Biblical Commission of which he is still a member for a second term - the first Indian to be honoured with such a privilege.

Raja was also one of the founders of மறை அருவி (Marai Aruvi), the first and so far the only theological journal in Tamil and he served as its joint editor from 1977-1979. He has written profusely both in Tamil and English, as evident from his extensive bibliography. Prof. L. Alonso Schoekel once said: "People ask us for bread and we offer them a handful of theories about each verse of John 6. They ask

questions about God and we offer them three theories about the literary form of one Psalm. They thirst for justice and we offer them discussions about the root of the word *sedāqa* ('justice' in Hebrew). I am examining my conscience out loud, and the reply I hear is: the one must be done without neglecting the other." Too well did Raja understand the importance and implication of this statement of his own professor and this is reflected in his articles which are neither too scientific nor too popular; he has used the interpretative technique to bring out the meaning of the biblical texts as applied to our times.

Many have high regard for Raja not only as a great scholar but also as a good friend. Equally Raja has a long list of friends, especially among biblical scholars both in India and abroad. Therefore it was a problem as to whom to approach for contributing articles to his *Festschrift*. Almost simultaneously the Tamilnadu biblicists were bringing out a book in Tamil in honour of Raja - a book explaining the Pontifical Biblical Commission's universally acclaimed document, **The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church** in which Raja, together with the Biblical Commission, has worked for three years. Hence it was easy to leave out all the biblicists in Tamilnadu and to contact the rest of Raja's friends in the other parts of India and abroad. Even then Raja has many friends who would be only too willing to contribute to his homage volume. But it was decided to restrict the area of contribution, welcoming articles dealing only with Raja's own central interests, namely the Lukan writings and the Psalms, the two areas so dear to him. The response was so amazing that we very easily got 14 articles at just a single invitation!

A Costly Commitment - Discipleship in the Gospel of Luke is the title of Raja's doctoral thesis, defended at the Gregorian University (Rome) in 1982. Naturally the third Gospel has been his favourite subject. Similarly out of the 13 articles that appear in this special issue, I deal with topics related to the Lukan writings (Part I), and at least 2 of them explicitly elaborate and explain the theme of discipleship. Hence **A Costly Commitment** is a fitting title to this homage volume.

Although Luke is commonly said to be a special friend of women, P.M. Meagher in his very intuitive article "Was Jesus of Nazareth Different?" reflects on gender and Jesus. In his judgement gender, as an issue as it is today, was not part of the consciousness of Jesus' time, since he was born, and he grew and lived in a patriarchal society. Meagher proposes, therefore, that we should "distil from his teaching and his actions the core of his religious vision and en flesh

this within the complexity of our lives." Developing this theme, as it were, J.J. Kilgallen next focuses his attention on the women and Mary mentioned in Acts 1:14. He concludes that what is characteristic of these women is discipleship which alone would qualify the followers of Jesus for a meaningful mission in the world as we approach the third millennium. This discipleship is taken up and further developed by J. Pathrapankal who portrays "Mary as an ideal and model disciple, the main emphasis of it being her ability and preparedness to accept the word of God into her life and lead a life in accordance with it."

Luke-Acts is full of narratives concerning the activity of the Holy Spirit, the divine power which was manifest in the ministry and life of Jesus and which should also be made manifest in the life of every Christian, if he/she has to more effectively bear witness to Christ, affirms L. Nereparampil. It is because of the active presence of the Holy Spirit that there is a variety of structures in the NT Churches. In this connection H. Wansbrough raises a series of questions which are quite challenging and ecumenically important. Although the Holy Spirit is very much active in the Acts, authority is surely not exercised only by him. The divine and the human work together and therefore R.F. O'Toole proposes the apostles as models of authority for later Church leaders.

In a very insightful essay L. Legrand argues that the episode of Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:41-52) serves as a chronological and theological transition between the infancy and public ministry and that by inserting this section Luke completes "also his broad sweep of the three stages of salvation history, a vista which underlines his theology and the composition of his Gospel." J. Lambrecht examines how Luke has adapted the original parable of the pounds and made it into the parable of the Throne Claimant (Lk 19:11-27) and how his view of salvation history corresponds with the placement of the parable. He also points out that although all of us hope to hear the approval from Christ at the final encounter (Lk 19:17), any kind of 'feverish expectation of the imminent end is altogether wrong.' Concentrating solely upon the choice of Barabbas and the way this episode functions in Luke's account of Jesus' trial (Lk 23:18-23), B. Byrne affirms that "God can incorporate even the most heinous human choice into a wider saving plan" and that he continues to summon readers to repentance and conversion.

The psalms have been another area of special interest for Raja; so much so he is known as சங்கீத ராஜா - king of psalms (like king David himself)! Therefore the second part of this volume contains four papers on the psalms.

The psalms have at their core an experience with which everyone of us can very easily identify. Taking this into account, M. Irudayaraj studies especially the penitential psalms, and brings out the law-sin-guilt scheme in them and invites the readers to experience God's forgiveness which is another name for his unconditional love. Analysing Ps 7, Ralph da Costa contends that the "psalmist, in identifying himself with the poor and the despised, places his trust in the Lord who always stays by the afflicted and the lowly, thus revealing his righteousness and his justice." Focusing attention on the literary and theological parameters which determined the compilation of the psalms, W.A.M. Beuken makes a detailed study of Ps 143 and concludes that the vicissitudes of the psalmist as servant of Yahweh in this psalm are expressed theologically in such a way that he appears as Israel's paradigmatic supplicant who first gives thanks to God for deliverance (Pss 144-145) and then leads all creation in the praise of Yahweh (Pss 146-150). In the last article A. Schenker gives a brief interpretation of Ps 53 as explained by the Karaite Yapheth ben Eli and "reminds us that we destroy our own Christian religion in the eyes of men when they cannot see there the religion of the love of God!"

Finally a word of thanks: thanks to Raja himself for his significant contribution to biblical renewal, coupled with a prayer for good health and a wish for many more years of dedicated service; sincere thanks to all our contributors for their willing cooperation; a special word of thanks to S. Jesudasan for his untiring efforts to make such a beautiful collection of articles possible; a final word of thanks to D. Alphonse, the successor of Raja as the editor of Vaiharai.

J. Susaimanickam
Editor